



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 07605093 3

# PERIWINKLE



WILLIAM  
FARQUHAR  
PAYSON



1

1



**PERIWINKLE**



NEW YORK  
PUBLIC LIBRARY

ALICE LENOX AND  
THELEN FOUNDATION  
B L





***“The secret spirit of these dunes.”***

# PERIWINKLE

An Idyl of the Dunes

BY

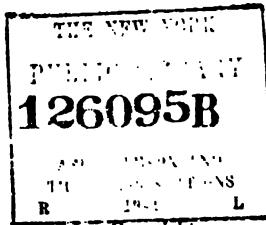
**WILLIAM FARQUHAR PAYSON**

**Author of "John Vytal," "Debonnaire,"  
"Barry Gordon," etc.**

**WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
THOMAS FOGARTY**

**New York  
STURGIS & WALTON  
COMPANY  
1910**

*All rights reserved*



By THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY

Copyright 1910

By STURGIS & WALTON COMPANY

Set up and electrotyped. Published September, 1910



IN REMEMBRANCE OF  
GEORGE F. J. KING  
AND THAT DAY WHEN  
THE SPIRIT OF THE DUNES  
FIRST REVEALED ITSELF TO US



## ILLUSTRATIONS

“ The secret spirit of these dunes.” <i>Frontispiece</i>	
“ She’s comin’ to, Cap! She’s comin’ to!” . . .	56
“ There was life in the man!” . . . . .	96
“ The elusive flush and radiance of the dunes, the rise of the breakers.” . . . . .	210



**PERIWINKLE**



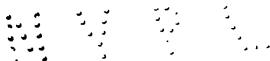
# PERIWINKLE

## I

**O**N the east the open ocean spreads out to the sky; on the west lie vast expanses of sand. The isolation of the spot is remarkable. Not over five miles inland well-filled trains crawl along the Cape from end to end twice daily, and a village of several hundred souls nestles in a pine forest, yet out here where the sea forever breaks across the bar the scene is utterly desolate.

Landwards as far as the eye can reach, the desert is unrelieved save by a few patches of scant, salty vegetation and by immense dunes. Seawards the waste of waters extends to a naked horizon which is seldom broken save by the masts of some far vessel, hull down.

The mariner gives this coast a wide berth.



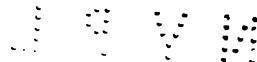
## PERIWINKLE

On the inner beach the bare bones of dead ships lie only half buried, and on the outer bar, at low tide, the white froth is strewn in sad profusion like lilies on a grave.

One might imagine oneself at the world's end instead of on the very breast of a teeming continent.

In the midst of this desolation some six or eight men, banded together under one roof by the ties of their calling, keep constant vigil against the sea.

The members of this little company are in many ways superior to other natives of the Cape. Their speech, though simple and laconic, is not heavily tinged with the vernacular. Their manners are courteous and quiet; they are hospitable to strangers, yet they are men of reserve and dignity. In the long intervals of enforced idleness, they read, meditate, discuss the weather, religion, politics, and some play games and some tinker at a carpenter's bench to save their minds from stagnation and



## PERIWINKLE

despair. They make knick-knacks, toy boats, walking-sticks and small wooden weather-vanes, little painted effigies of sailormen with paddles in hand that spin about in the wind. They sell these to visitors or in the distant villages. ♀

Once a week, weather and work permitting, each enjoys what is called his liberty day and trudges to the shop with his strange merchandise, or reverts to family and hearthside, while some lacking these, even drift to baser joys which the other six days deny them. Their isolation from mankind seems only to intensify their human feeling. Under the calm surface their hearts beat to a passionate rhythm. There is something of the primeval sea in them, the race heritage, very strong.

But the sum and substance is duty and the keynote vigilance. Their lives are for the most part austere, sacrificial, even monastic, and though their eyes, ever on the sea, are filled with a brooding loneliness, inspiration burns in them, too. Even if outwardly they are a

## **PERIWINKLE**

work-a-day lot, horny-handed, weather-worn and matter-of-fact, there's that about them which, to the seeing eye, proclaims them men of a large and heroic calibre.

Their home is a little building all but lost on the edge of the continent. It stands under the lee of a solitary sand-dune, and huddled in this small outpost, these men are the nation's pickets, sentries ever watching the Atlantic. They are the men of the Crooked Bar Life-Saving Station.

## II

**A** YOUNG surfman stood in the lookout above the station. It was a fine January morning, unseasonably mild, and his eyes were bitter against it. A wiry, nervous youth, new to the service and as yet untried, he was thirsting for the taste of his first storm and wreck, fretting for his initiation, his virgin struggle with the surf.

Already he had acquired the habits of a man accustomed to lonely watches. He spoke aloud to himself, lacking a better listener, and his talk was openly rebellious against the prolonged calm.

“No work this kind of weather,” he muttered, frowning at the blandness of nature. “God, it’s tame! More like June than the dead of winter. Damn this waitin’!”

To his surprise he was answered.

## PERIWINKLE

“How’s that, Ira?”

He turned and saw the head and shoulders of the station’s keeper protruding through the trap-door that gave entrance from below.

The keeper, Captain Sears by name, ascended the ladder into the lookout.

“How’s that, Ira? What did you say?”

“I said, ‘Damn this waitin’!’ ” was the sullen reply.

Captain Sears nodded.

“I thought you’d be grumblin’,” he observed not unkindly. “That’s why I came up. Fine weather’s tellin’ on you, eh? Always does at the start. It ain’t the storms that get on a man’s nerves; it’s the everlastin’ waitin’ for ‘em.”

He was a man of about forty, and his face had none of the fretting look of his young subordinate. That had long ago deepened into a sort of large underlying shadow. His shoulders stooped as if the sea had already begun to beat down his powerful body, but he held his head erect with spirit and authority.

## PERIWINKLE

Crossing to one of the surrounding windows, he stood with arms akimbo on the sill. He surveyed the sea with a curious unconscious intentness born of long habit, his gaze not wandering over the water but ranging across it slowly with the true sentry look. The glare of the sun on the glassy surface was so intense that he pulled down his vizored cap a little, and lowered his lids.

“Maybe you won’t have to wait long,” he said at length.

Ira made a covert grimace of incredulity. His gaze was not a seeing gaze like that of the master surfman.

Not a ripple, not a cloud. The day was so fair that the earth’s spherical shape seemed visible, or at least appreciable, in the ocean’s slight bulge and the arc of the horizon. The blue of the water was very rich and dark save where the sun bleached it into mere shine. The sky was only a paler sea, itself almost glassy.

“Couldn’t be clearer,” said Ira.

## PERIWINKLE

“That’s the point,” said the keeper; “it’s too clear.”

Ira glanced at the barometer.

“No change,” he reported.

“Wait,” said Captain Sears.

Ira turned his back on the vacant prospect and fell to filling his clay pipe.

“Drills and drills,” he muttered half to himself, jamming down the tobacco with irritable thumb; “and then more drills! Beach apparatus, surfboat and regulations, and then more regulations! Parade the beach all by your lonesome, parade the beach and then parade again! Watch, watch, watch—up here like a stuffed owl in a glass case—and keep on watchin’ till the crack of doom!”

He felt the keeper’s eye on him and looked up sheepishly.

The older man frowned.

“What’s the use of that sort of talk?” he demanded sternly. “Some day your cranky nature’ll get you into trouble.” He laid a firm hand on the novitiate’s shoulder. “Well,

## PERIWINKLE

it's out of you now. You feel better, don't you? I understand. I felt that way myself twenty year' ago." He paused, straining an ear toward an open northeast window. "Listen!"

Ira listened but heard nothing unusual. The day was as still as it was clear. Save for the faint lapping of the tide against the beach, there was no sound. Not a breath of air stirred. Just below in their dormitory some of the men, up the night before, were sleeping out the day, quiet as if dead; and below the sleepers, those in the mess-room could rarely be heard in the lookout.

"Don't you notice it?" said the keeper.

"No. What?"

"I don't know. You never can name it. You don't exactly hear it. You feel it. I'll wager the grass is moving."

They gazed northeast along the great reaches of sand.

Here and there strips of salt hay struggled for life on the crests of the sandhills. These

## PERIWINKLE

grasses were all utterly motionless. Everywhere the sand lay untroubled, a deadly golden desert, trackless and empty, and yet full of a magical monotony that might well have turned a man's brain.

“Give me the spy-glass,” said Captain Sears, and trained the instrument on one of the farthest dunes.

After one long glance the keeper smiled and surrendered the glass to his subordinate. Then Ira, squinting through it, saw on the far dune's ridge a flicker of silver so faint as to be almost imperceptible, and a very slight haze blurring the dune's outlines.

It was the first motion of the salt grasses, the first waking of the sand before a storm.

### III

**T**HERE was another man on that lonely shore as quick to feel the storm's approach.

Two or three miles to the southwest the beach made an inward curve and the face of Nature wore a less desolate aspect. The change was abrupt. On the station side of the bend lay desert wastes, but just beyond this sudden curve, the Cape, protected from winter winds by a sandy bulwark, was here and there warmed and softly tinted by increasing vegetation. The salt hay, so scant to the northeast, here lay spread in fair-sized meadows, while extensive reddish cranberry bogs, acres of silver-green field-moss, and brown poverty grass in lengthy streaks, lent varied colours to the landscape. And in the distance inland an occasional pinetree or scrub

## PERIWINKLE

oak, half buried in the sand, suggested shade and shelter.

The isolation, however, was no less complete. The expanse was broken by but one human habitation.

Despite the loneliness of its surroundings, this little dwelling, with its connecting barn and sheds, was snugly situated. It lay in one of the secret places of the dunes.

But the buildings had long ago fallen into disrepair. Here and there the spreading field-moss that carpeted the near-by slopes had crept over the shingles; and here and there where the weather-beaten shingles still remained bare to sun and rain, the decaying wood had taken on gentle violet tones, which, together with the pallid green of the moss, made the rickety little structures seem almost impalpable.

One of the sheds was closely packed with salt hay, which bulging through the cracks and open corners, seemed necessary to the roof's stability. Indeed, the village gossips had it

## PERIWINKLE

that the owner had never dared thrust pitch-fork into that hay to feed his horse, lest the entire building topple to the sand. Be that as it may, the old Dobbin had long since died, whether or not of starvation on this account, and the hay was still there supporting the ram-shackle shed—a monument to the owner's parsimony and caution.

That person had a strangely morbid taste for decoration. Over the sagging lintel of the shed's entrance hung a board from the stern of a wrecked ship. It still bore her name in faded letters that had once been white:

*Cynthia Jennings,  
Portland.*

Over the door of the dwelling itself hung another:

*Grand Turk,  
Providence.*

And the rambling old barn was similarly named. Above its wide doorway hung a panel, once no doubt on a gallant ship. The

## PERIWINKLE

gilt letters were badly tarnished by time, but could just be read:

*Valkyrie,*

Liverpool.

A glance about the dooryard would have revealed yet more glaringly this householder's queer proclivities. Heaped in the yard or thrown about at random, there were other panels: *Jessie E. Mack*, Boston; *Osprey*, Rockland; *Martha Dabney*, Charleston, and many more. And all round them lay the stray timbers of countless wrecks—tillers, steering-wheels, stanchions like human ribs, deck-planks and what not, gathered through the years by the avid hands of a beachcomber.

No wonder this man could feel the coming of the storm.

Late that evening he stood on the headland, watching the murk gather over the Atlantic. From an upper window of their cottage his daughter watched it, too. By glancing obliquely through a wide cleft in the sand-

## PERIWINKLE

bank she could see the ocean. Often at night she sought this vantage-point.

It was the old story of sea-wife, sea-widow. Her man had gone out with the Provincetown cod-fleet once too often. She could have stood that, being a hard woman who had little more than tolerated his easy-going fisher-soul. But his loss had robbed her of the thing her bleak heart craved more than it could ever crave a husband's love. Their marriage had been fruitless, and now she was beyond the time of bearing. Yet she still thirsted for a child.

She was one of those women full of stony traits amid the crevices of which, Fate has ironically planted the mother-love.

Without the touch of the ever-imagined little hands, the sound of the fancied little footfalls, and above all, the miraculous appealing helplessness of the tiny, dreamed-of bundle, her life was as barren as the shore on which she lived. For other women, there were a thousand substitutes—blessings, perhaps, even more satisfying to them than the one she had

## PERIWINKLE

longed for; but for her, isolated here with only her beachcombing father—an old “mosser” the villagers called him—life seemed unendurable.

In her youth she had been a district school-mistress, and her education only added to her discontent.

As the sky darkened, and the storm brewed, and the sea rose and fell, her flat chest rose and fell, too, with a like agitation. The increasing chill of the night penetrated to her heart; the far moan of the gale seemed but the echo of a cry she had been smothering for years.

She had the face of the so-called New England type, cold, sharp-featured, almost mean; but her hair was a warm brown, and softened her high cheekbones and temples; and her tall body, though meagre and ill nourished, had a certain bending grace like that of a mother leaning over a cradle.

As she stood there, gazing out into the night, she could have wished that the sea might rise

## PERIWINKLE

and engulf her and this mockery of a home; that it might roll in and bury her alive as it had buried her husband.

This was not impossible. Already she saw by the cottage lights the white spume flying above the headland. Already the surf sent its swift wash in through the passage from the sea. The night was dark, but there were great blotches of cloud yet darker, moving heavily over the ocean. The sea itself was inky and growing ever more turbulent, and the sand whirled by in gusts. It scratched her window, blurring it.

She could just make out the dark form of her father against the flying spray. As she watched him, he was joined by a second figure, probably the patrol from the life-saving station.

She must have stood there for hours. As usual on such a night, the sand had ground the panes until they were quite opaque and would have to be replaced when she could squeeze the money out of her miserly father.

## PERIWINKLE

She could see nothing more in the outer night.

As she turned, she heard a footstep below and her father called her.

“Ann, gimme some gin and hot water.”

She went down to him and found him shaking with cold, his long hair dank about his ears, his eyes half filled with sand, his rusty old coat soaking, his brogans gone at the toes, and oozing salt water.

He seated himself near the stove and watched her mix his toddy.

“Who’s on the beach to-night?” she asked, busying herself mechanically with kettle, bottle and tumbler.

“Jim Curran,” he told her.

“H’m, he’s so big I guess it strikes him harder’n the rest.”

“Yes, but he’s got young blood in him. I wish I had.”

His hot concoction was ready now, and he gulped it down. Then he rose and went to the door.

## PERIWINKLE

“Father!” she exclaimed; “you’re not going out again this night!”

“Yes, I am,” he said, huddling up his shoulders and bending his head to meet the blast. “You bet I am!” His voice took on a queer, eager ring that had so often struck on her nerves. “Somewhar’ off to the nor’east Jim and me saw a ship’s rocket, an’ thet means business!”

## IV

THE men in the station had seen that rocket, too—a faint yellow light streaking up from the sea. Jim Curran, forcing his way back against the gale, saw an answering signal shoot up from the station.

The patrol was a young giant not long out of his teens, yet he had already worked at a dozen wrecks and what he lacked in initiative, he made up for in discipline, what he lacked in brain, he made up for in body. He had none of the nervous impatience of young Ira, few of the loftier qualities of Captain Sears. But he had a good stout heart and such a methodical way with him that not a man in all the Cape stations could be more implicitly trusted to do his duty, as prescribed by the regulations of the service.

The invisible vessel, being disabled, as her

## PERIWINKLE

rocket implied, could not long keep far off shore against the force of the present north-easter. If she was helpless, the sea would inevitably cast her up, the only question being where.

Jim struggled heavily forward against the gale, his head bent, his glance frequently cast sidelong at the sea. He carried before his face, to protect him from the biting sand, a surfman's wooden paddle, round and short-handled like a palm-leaf fan. He had carried this paddle only a year, yet already the sand had worn it thin as paper. To-night it did little good. The sand beat about it into his face, and the sea-salt from the flying spray was acrid on his lips and in his nostrils. Now and again he paused, half turned, and with eyes all but shut against the storm, directed his gaze full upon the sea.

Finally, as he came to a point about half way between the beachcomber's dwelling and the station, he saw the expected sight. Out amid the spray over the bar several lights

## PERIWINKLE

caught his eye—two or three yellow blurs, and one green, and one red. Then he made out masts and spars above the lights, but the vessel's hull was hidden by the breakers.

He thought he heard men's cries borne in on the wind.

He drew a Coston signal from a pocket in his oilskins, and sheltering it from the blast, lighted it. The crimson fire flared boldly on the headland, burned several minutes with intense vividness, then went out, and save for the pallid speck of light from the patrolman's lantern, the night was blacker than before.

But soon the gloom was again broken, this time by several other lanterns approaching along the bluff, and Jim made out the heavy familiar shapes, the big white horse laboriously dragging the boat-waggon, the men in their oilskins—yellow phantoms in the lantern-light—urging, struggling, tugging, plunging forward to the rescue.

He sprang to them and took his position in the crew.

## PERIWINKLE

Captain Sears stood apart a moment, straining his eyes towards the unlucky ship. He could just make out her masts high against the sky. She had evidently been lifted by the sea and dropped, bow on, diagonally across the bar. She seemed to be still holding together. What little canvas she had been carrying flew in shreds from her masts and lifted bowsprit, but the masts themselves rose true, and her hull, though now and then high and stark, as the seas were sucked from under it, was still a compact shadow.

Her danger, however, had become imminent. Captain Sears had seen many a vessel twice her size snapped in two on this bar like a lathe across a man's knee.

He glanced up and down along the shore. The sea was hurling itself against the sandy bulwark on which he stood. The concussion of the waves was loud as the fire of heavy guns, and clouds of blinding, smoky spray buried the cliff after each explosion.

It was as if the sea lay playing with the

## PERIWINKLE

caught ship, like a tigress mauling a fawn, and at the same time spat and growled at the little group of would-be rescuers.

Captain Sears took action at once. The training of years had made him resourceful and quick at every trick of his trade. Under all conditions of wind, sea, beach and wreck, he was full of swift common-sense.

He immediately saw that the surfboat was useless in the present instance. Just here there was no beach from which to launch it. The sea would have crushed it like a shell against the headland.

The captain moved past the boat-waggon to the lighter cart with its reel, mortar and shot-line. He could not issue spoken orders; the crash of the surf was too deafening, and the salt spray and sand were like a gag in his mouth; but the men understood his movements. Instantly they shifted from boat to beach-apparatus, each to his place.

They set to work like artillery-men unlimbering a cannon. The task was done at light-

## PERIWINKLE

ning speed. After one swift moment of agile and concerted action, everything was ready—the faking-boxes with their intricate mass of rope ready to spring forth straight and free, the blocks, tackles, breeches-buoy and mortar all in position.

The vessel lay perhaps three hundred yards off shore—a long range for accurate shooting; but the need of haste, hit or miss, was desperate. Already the remnants of her sails were gone, leaving her masts bare, and the breakers, splotched with red and green under her lights, could be seen curling over her like livid fangs striking at her heart.

Already the shadowy forms of men could be made out—or was it only imagined?—aloft on her crosstrees, clinging to her upper rigging.

Captain Sears trained his gun slightly to the north and east of her, a little to windward, measuring instinctively the gale's force, the distance, the elevation. This was a bad business, aiming from the headland. An inch too

## PERIWINKLE

low and the projectile would drop out, which meant reloading—a moment's delay.

But the vessel was high astride the bar like a spiked horse.

He fired. A tongue of flame from the gun's mouth licked the night, a detonation like a mere hand-clap sounded in the storm, and the long whip-line, visible for a second in the light of the flash, went writhing outward over the sea.

The keeper's aim was true. The line fell clean over the crosstrees and hung there. The surfmen could tell by the feel of it, as a fisherman feels a bite. Also they could see the shadow-forms in the rigging reaching out for the line; could see, by the binnacle light in the stern, other shadowy figures looking aloft from the deck and waving their arms as if shouting directions to those above them.

Then there came a pull at the line, and the great block and hauser of the breeches-buoy moved heavily outward toward the ship.

Too late.

## PERIWINKLE

That rescue was not to be. Those little human shadows out there, working frantically to save their lives, exerted themselves in vain. They were as so many sand-grains in the tempest. The rescuing buoy never reached them. The pythoness sea was quicker.

Suddenly the general crash of the surf seemed to culminate in a sharper crash out on the bar, the frequent explosions of the waves, in a sharper explosion out on the bar. The masts of the wrecked ship spread apart V-shape against the heavens; her black hull broke in two and tottered into the ferment; her lights went down into everlasting darkness, and at that last awful moment, there came ashore on the wind a cry of anguish in a woman's voice.

The surfmen never forgot that cry in all their years on the beaches. It was like the death-cry of the ship herself, or the cry of the sea suddenly awake to the thing she had done in her frenzy—the mother-sea sorrowing for the sons she had slain so wantonly.

## V

**T**HE surfmen, though their hearts were heavy, showed no emotion.

The whip-line now being free of the wreck, Jim hauled it in mechanically like an angler with no luck. As the last yard of it came ashore he stooped, took up the line in a mass in his arms, then turned, dumped it loose into the faking-box and replaced the box on the cart. Captain Sears, no less methodical, picked up his lantern and led the way along toward a breach in the headland to gain access to the surf.

Ira, the novitiate, groaned aloud. He had not yet acquired the stoicism of the service. He stood transfixed at the edge of the bluff. His eyes and nostrils were full of sand and salt; his oilskins were frozen stiff; he ached in every joint, not only from the cold but from

## PERIWINKLE

the exertion of the long pull; yet he was scarcely conscious of bodily discomfort. He simply stood staring stupidly through the void, out toward the ship's grave.

Gradually Nature's fever passed its crisis; the delirium of the elements began to abate; the wind hammered against the dazed young surfman less violently; the flying crests, instead of drenching him as before, now only doused him at intervals.

The sky had long been a black pall, one immense cloud; now that cloud was in great fragments with spaces less black between, and the movement of the sea became visible, and the world in which Ira stood was no longer a void but a sort of tumbling chaos.

But there was no ship out on the bar, no black hull with its little shadows crawling along the deck; there were no masts and cross-trees against the sky with those little shadows clinging to them for dear life; and the woman's voice in the wind was forever silent.

Ira delayed there many minutes, forgetting

## PERIWINKLE

his duties, striving to accustom himself to this tragedy, this terrible initiation. Gradually the darkness grew less black, and from over the sea, a greyish light, almost imperceptible, began to steal landward through the clouds and waves. Above the bar the crests of the breakers began to show traces of white, and the spume, spilt along that far line of sand, could just be discerned by its faint pallor.

The sea-lilies were already strewn on the ship's grave.

Ira heard a voice in his ear. Turning he saw the miserable figure of Ephraim Rawlins, the beachcomber.

"Come, young'un," said Ephraim. "Cap'n Sears sent me for you."

He stuck a shaking hand in Ira's arm and hurried him down toward the group of lanterns.

"Why d'ye hang back here? Guess he'll forgive ye this time but never again. Now's the real work. The bodies'll be washing in—maybe some alive." His lips were close to

## PERIWINKLE

Ira's ears as the two hastened to the beach. His voice shivered with eagerness and cold. "An' then the cargo!" he exclaimed passionately, as if that meant far more to him than the drowning crew. "Hurry! Now's your chance to get your baptism in the surf."

There was no need to prod the young life-saver. Ira's first numbing horror had given place to shame at his delay, and now the shame gave way to a fervent desire to redeem himself by this baptism.

He outran the beachcomber down the hill.

Already the sea was casting up fragments of the unlucky vessel. Broken spars came ashore and scraps of deck planking—a section of the gunwale with gaping holes in it which had once been scuppers; a piece of the bowsprit with a little rag of jibsail still clinging to it; a smashed chair; the side of a bunk; the leg of a table; a window-sash with a few bits of glass still shining in it—all these for the beachcomber's hoard.

## PERIWINKLE

How rapaciously Ephraim gloated over that harvest! Hither and thither he shuffled, his hair flapping damply about his ears, his teeth chattering, his hands like talons. The instant anything floated in, he pounced on it, fingered it fondly a moment, then scrambled back with it to a place of safety. Avid, full of curiosity and expectation, his every motion nervous and prying, his eye cocked sharply at each new wave, he was like an old magpie hopping about to pick and steal. What a strange contrast to the deliberate and stalwart life-savers!

The opening which Captain Sears had selected was like a gate-way to the sea. Not wide enough to permit a safe launching of the boat, it nevertheless afforded passage to the crew.

Ira found them in a close group at this vantage-point, searching the surf for castaways. Two of the men were out beyond their depth, falsely lured by floating timbers from the wreck. They wore cork belts, and life-lines that extended back to the ready hands of

## PERIWINKLE

their comrades on the beach. Though the storm was slowly subsiding, the crew was close in the teeth of it now, fighting the sea, as it were, in hand to hand conflict.

The turmoil seemed worse than before. The men's faces were white with salt, their eyes bloodshot and lips bleeding with its sting. The waves came combing in so close that their arching hollows were mottled with dim and sickly green spots by the many lanterns and seemed a living pestilence. Now and again some monster, mightier than the rest, broke so far in shore that the terrible seethe and smother of it was almost unendurable.

And everywhere over the stricken shore and the vast sea-tomb, the wind intoned a dirge more tragic than its earlier battle-hymn.

But the men, repeatedly lured by those dark objects floating in the froth, went plunging into that tomb to snatch from it, if they could, some human body yet alive.

Their defeat with the beach-apparatus seemed to have doubled their zeal for rescue.

## PERIWINKLE

They were now consumed by a passion to save life. They pitted themselves single-handed against the breakers. Did an object show itself in the cavernous hollows, down they went for it, diving deep into the sea's bowels. Did it show itself on the crests, up they went to the skies, and the sea was a bull tossing them on its horns, then hurling them to the depths again and trampling them.

And still there was no important salvage, not a single human form, not a clue to the ship's name, home-port or destination.

Captain Sears, at the water's edge, glanced over this and that piece of wreckage as the sea washed it up to him. His main concern was for his men, but he had official duties. There were numerous routine details in the captain's business.

Business? Yes. He was the recipient of a new consignment—that was all—and inventories must be made. The sea was delivering to him without invoice a certain parcel of freight—wreckage and dead sailors probably

## PERIWINKLE

—and he was a receiving clerk who had to list what came.

How much more than this did it mean to him? In his intervals of idleness, many who saw the underlying shadow in the man's face, agreed that Captain Sears had a great soul; but to-night, he was only business-like.

“Damn the luck! They must have all gone down outside the bar. My report won't say much this time.”

“Cap!”

Ira stood beside him.

“Yes.” The tone was indifferent, even forbidding.

“Cap, forgive me for hangin' back up there. The thought of those folks drowning kinder dazed me. That voice—Forgive me, will you, Cap? Ain't there something I can do?”

The captain eyed the young fellow in the greyness—eyed him narrowly to see what stuff he was made of.

“Cap, don't think I was afraid you'd send me into the surf. I wish to God you would!”

## PERIWINKLE

Captain Sears replied coldly:

"You'll find a foothold on the beach under the headland. Take a look along there. It'll be a tight squeeze, but I suppose you're anxious for a tight squeeze;" and he turned on his heel to give other orders.

The young novice, on fire to prove himself worthy, made off at once through the passage, and turning from the others, felt his way along the strip of beach under the towering sandbank. He was so impatient to qualify as a full-fledged surfman that he forgot one of the strictest regulations of the service. He neglected to put on his cork belt and thus was again delinquent. But this time he went to the other extreme and was not too slow but too hasty.

Rash and impetuous, he plunged along the narrow beach, seeking a vantage-point of his own—one that might give him a chance to outdo his seniors. He made for the spot just below that section of the headland where they had worked with the mortar and shot-line.

## PERIWINKLE

This was the point nearest to the ship's grave. He had to wade to get there. Knee-deep, even hip-deep in the surf's white lather, he struggled forward along the base of the bluff, step by step, inch by inch, now crouching against the bank as the breakers reached out to seize him, now labouring on again through the slippery suds they left behind them.

He gained his goal at last, and turning face to face with the ocean, saw again straight ahead of him, far out on Crooked Bar, the pale flowerlike foam that marked the ship's burial-place.

He had his lantern on his arm, but its flame was now feeble and wan in the greyness and cast no helpful beams about him.

This was the dim drab hour before the dawn. Overhead the sky was dull and sullen with slow writhing vapours here and there, like the smoke of funeral pyres; and the sea was the colour of the leaden lining of coffins; and the wind's requiem was ending brokenly in sharp gusts that were like the sobs of a woman.

## PERIWINKLE

For these were the obsequies of drowned sailors, and few are the dead so honoured. The moan of the wind, the sea-sepulchre, the white foam-flowers, the very sky a pall—what prince could have had these last sad rites from nature?

All was death. Could it be possible that out of it life might emerge into the dawn?

That was the miracle that happened.

Ira stood with his back against the bluff, trying to keep a safe foothold between it and the breakers. With narrowed gaze, he keenly scanned the sea.

Suddenly he started forward, straining his eyes. Out on the water he saw something human-looking.

Instantly he acted without another thought for his own safety. He threw aside his lantern, pulled off his rubber boots, tore off his coat, then without life-line or cork belt, dashed at once into the surf. Now began his virgin struggle with the sea, and the sea was living and female.

## PERIWINKLE

At first, she repulsed him, flung him back, crushing him against the bluff. Desperately he caught at that embankment to try and steady himself and keep his footing, but the sand crumbled in his fingers. Then the undertow, that minion of the harlot sea, tripped him and dragged him out along the bottom.

Instinctively he struck out again, and swam upward, and managed to gain the surface, and draw breath. Then he fought to keep out from the bluff to save his body from being mangled.

Not that he cared much—if only he could first lay hold on that other human thing far out beyond the breakers.

He dived through wave after wave; but the exertion soon told on him. He found himself at the sea's mercy, and she played with him wantonly. Up, up he went to the very sky, then down and down to the ocean bed, blind, wounded, helpless, the sea in savage dalliance drawing him into her bosom and stifling him with her caresses.

## PERIWINKLE

Suddenly in despair, Ira summoned his remaining strength and struck out once more. This time he gained the unbroken billows beyond the surf. He was now in deep water midway between bar and beach, and though the seas ran high, he was free of the white chaos of the foam.

He opened his eyes which were filled with salt. As he did so, he seemed to have a dream. He seemed to see in a blurred way a woman's arm reaching up out of the ocean, a woman's hand holding something aloft above the surface. The arm was growing shorter, sinking; the hand was moving downward towards the water, but some intelligence seemed intent on keeping it upraised to the very last for the sake of the thing it held.

The woman in her final moment must have seen him coming.

Ira reached out in his dream and tried to seize her hand. It slipped from him, the waters closed over it forever, and he found a sort of bundle in his grasp.

## PERIWINKLE

He turned to try and swim ashore with his mysterious prize, but he was too far spent. He struggled bravely to the end; struggled to save himself and this strange bundle; struggled shoreward ever more futilely till at last he fainted in the surf.

This was the youth's terrible baptism.

## VI

IRA was jerked back to consciousness by a hand gripping his collar at the nape of his neck, and tugging him through the water. He heard Jim Curran roar, "Don't struggle!" and then they both, without any effort on their part, were pulled shoreward, twisting and tumbling through the breakers.

They landed in a heap on the beach at the feet of the crew. They were picked up and laid on the dry sand behind the headland. Then Ira fainted again.

When he came to, he saw Captain Sears looking down at him anxiously. As he opened his eyes, the older man, evidently relieved, bent over him and pressed a flask to his lips.

"How do you feel, Ira?"

"All right, Cap."

The keeper helped him to his feet. It was

## PERIWINKLE

now morning, grey but no longer obscure.

“You were a fool,” said the captain gruffly. “You broke the regulations. You went into the surf without your cork jacket. If I hadn’t kep’ an eye on you from the bluff—”

“I’m sorry, Cap. I saw something out in the water—Now I remember. I got hold of it.”

“Yes,” said the keeper, finding it hard to conceal his admiration; “that’s why I’m going to overlook your breach of discipline. You got hold of something, and what’s more you didn’t let go. We’ve been working over her a full hour.”

“Her?” Ira’s jaw dropped.

“Yes, her.”

“But the woman sank; she was drowned.”

The captain looked puzzled.

“Woman? Who’s talking about a woman. You’re pretty previous. Come along and see.”

Ira followed him.

The surfboat had been lowered from the waggon to the sand, where they had partly

## PERIWINKLE

overturned it and propped it up like a lean-to. Under it, they had spread the horse-blanket. The men were peering into this impromptu shelter at a little yellow bundle that lay on the blanket. Big Jim Curran, in his shirt-sleeves, was kneeling beside the bundle, bending over it solicitously. Hearing the captain's voice, he looked up, his honest face beaming.

“She's comin' to, Cap! She's comin' to!  
Would you dare try brandy?”

“A few drops,” said the captain, holding out the flask.

Jim saw Ira and rose.

“Kid, you give it to her,” he said. “She's yours.”

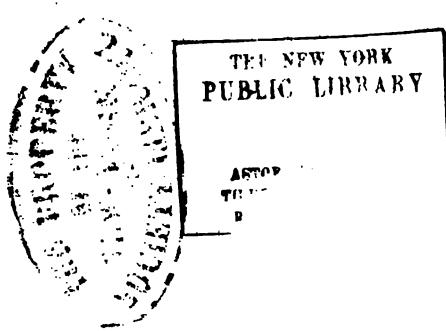
Ira, who was still weak and cold, took the flask with a shaking hand. He bent closer to look. The captain extended his lantern to dispel the shadows under the big surfboat.

The sight that met Ira's eyes staggered him. Wrapped in Jim's oilskin coat, lay a small girl baby!

She could not have been two years old, so



“She's comin' to, Cap! She's comin' to!”



## PERIWINKLE

small she was; but her features were well formed and her dark reddish hair was already long enough to straggle about her ears. It looked like sea-weed around a shell.

Ira, bashful and awkward, went down on one knee beside her. With trembling fingers he touched the flask to her baby lips. He waited breathless. Then, after a long moment, she opened her eyes and looked at him, and he beckoned excitedly to the others with a hand behind his back.

They tiptoed closer and peered in at her over his shoulder. Her eyes wandered gravely from one to the other; then gradually her little oval face, not pretty but very quaint with large grave blue eyes and a frame of sea-weed hair, took on a look that made them hold their breath. The look grew, and every man's oil-skins rustled with a sudden thrill. Ira's hand behind his back was frantic with gesticulations to the others. She was smiling at them.

The face of the captain lighted up as it had not lighted up for years.

## PERIWINKLE

“Seems to like us,” he whispered. “Ain’t she a queer little sea-urchin? She’s a reg’lar little seashell cast ashore, eh? She’s a reg’lar little periwinkle!”

## VII

CAPTAIN SEARS and five of his crew, being now favoured by a calmer sea, prepared to launch the boat and pull off to the immediate scene of the wreck.

Ira and Jim, meanwhile, were delegated to take the child to the station. They ploughed back through the sand, each by turn carrying her tenderly in his arms.

The station was provided by a benevolent society with warm clothing for ship-wrecked men and women, but at the moment there happened to be nothing for little children. So they wrapped her in a sailor's blue flannel shirt and put a pair of woollen socks, number twelve, on her diminutive feet, tying up the toes in big knots to make them fit as snugly as possible.

At first, as the awkward surfmen fussed

## PERIWINKLE

over their little charge, she was frightened, and cried; but they soothed her as best they could, big Jim saying sympathetically, "There —there!" and humming a baby song to her in a voice that seemed to rumble upward from his rubber boots.

The strangeness of the proceedings soon awoke a certain wondering interest in the child. The blue flannel shirt, preposterously large for her, seemed to fill her with an awe too deep for tears, and the knots in the giant socks were a source of much curiosity. She began to look upon her toilet as a game, a kind of masquerade, and when it was complete, held up her arms with the long flapping sleeves and seemed to demand freedom for her hands.

Jim rolled up one, Ira the other, as eagerly as if reefing sail in a storm.

Then she fell to playing with the knotted socks, and presently looking up at the two surf-men, uttered a little cooing laugh, like a young pigeon.

## PERIWINKLE

From that moment, Periwinkle held their hearts captive.

They now replenished the fire in the stove, deposited her in the captain's chair well within the circle of the stove's warmth, held up commanding forefingers at her, bidding her not to move, and fell to preparing breakfast.

Suddenly a disturbing thought struck Ira. He drew his companion aside.

"Jim," he whispered, "what if she ain't been weaned?"

Big Jim uttered a low whistle.

"Lord! she must have been," he whispered. "She's not an infant—looks to me as much as two year' old."

He went lumbering back to the vicinity of the chair by the stove, and as if to drop a suggestion to its occupant, which she might regard or not according to her sovereign pleasure, said aloud to Ira:

"Do you suppose she could eat an egg?"

That tactful hint was rewarded. To their

## PERIWINKLE

amazement and delight, they heard her say, “Ed! ed!” repeating it to herself not like a parrot but with a real eagerness, very hungry and delighted.

Jim took down a frying-pan from a hook in the closet, but Ira shook his head at him testily from behind her.

“My Lord, not a fried egg! A boiled one, not over two minutes. Didn’t you ever have a mother?”

They put a sauce-pan on the stove instead. Periwinkle could talk—at least she could say a few detached words, and she did so in a sort of off-hand way to herself while they prepared breakfast. First, they heard her say “toat” and “’tocks”—words that evidently applied to the two articles of her apparel; and they smiled and winked at each other, congratulating themselves on her growing satisfaction with her surroundings.

Ira consulted his watch to time the boiling process.

## PERIWINKLE

“Beginning to feel at home,” he whispered, as they bent over the sauce-pan.

“Yes—reg’lar little Daughter of the Regiment,” said Jim, spooning out the egg to see if the shell dried on the instant.

Then she said, “ ‘torm,” with a little quaver as if the storm had been naughty to her, and their hearts grew heavy, and Jim, with spoon and egg in hand, had recourse to his sympathetic, “There—there!”

They always remembered that morning.

Life at the Crooked Bar station underwent a remarkable change. Periwinkle was there three days, and when she was asleep the men walked on tip-toe and conversed in whispers. The captain transformed his room into a poor apology for a nursery and shared the quarters of his crew. Their talk was womanish at this time.

“Ssh! you’ll wake her!” or, “My Lord! you’ve got the step of an elephant;” or this

## PERIWINKLE

from Ira: "I wish we had a cow;" and this from Jim: "Well, anyhow, it's lucky we've got good layin' hens."

Naturally there was much discussion of plans. The sea had yielded up nothing suggestive of the vessel's name or owners. The bodies of three of her crew were washed ashore further down the beach—one American, two Scandinavian in appearance—but they were almost naked and could not be identified. The surfmen had to bury them deep in the sandy desert.

For days the villages inland on the Cape were inaccessible from the Crooked Bar station. The men were cut off as if on an island and with them the little sea-waif they called Periwinkle.

It was the keeper's opinion that they would do well to give the child to Ann Scudder, the beachcomber's daughter.

"Ann's a lonely woman," he said. "She might take to it. Her husband used to tell me she'd never got over not having a child."

## PERIWINKLE

The suggestion was not to their liking. The beachcomber's dwelling with its wreckage and gloom seemed no fit place for their sunny little charge, and Ann herself was no less sombre.

"She's hard—hard as nails," objected Ira, to which the entire crew assented.

"She mightn't feel motherly," said one of them, "with the child of another woman." The speaker was sad and thin-faced, and looked like a schoolmaster. "She's a flinty one, or my name ain't Sam Coffin!"

"You're right, Sam; flinty's the word," said big Jim.

"I don't know," rejoined the keeper, smoking ruminatively. "She don't show her feelings of course. She'd rather burn off her hand than let us think she wanted Periwinkle; but all the same—"

There was a general grumble and shaking of heads at this, and the captain, deferring to their protests, let the matter drop.

Then began a series of strange happenings

## PERIWINKLE

at the Crooked Bar station. They received—or rather Periwinkle received—a number of what Sam Coffin called “mysterious visitations.”

At first they thought there must be some mistake, held one or another of their own number responsible for the phenomena; but in the end, evidence of an outer agency grew undeniable.

The first suspicious incident was this: the baby, who had been left alone one afternoon in the captain’s room, playing at driving his chair with a piece of hauser, was found asleep in bed, carefully tucked in under the blanket.

The next queer occurrence came the following morning. They had given her several of their small tin flags to play with—perfect models, in colour and outline, of the large signal flags. As a rule, these models were used by new men to learn the International Code; now they were a baby’s toys, such was Periwinkle’s conquest at the Crooked Bar Life-Saving Station.

## PERIWINKLE

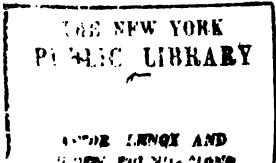
The bright colours of these little tin signals delighted her. She loved to wave them at Captain Sears. He had left her this morning to play with them alone, the many bright-coloured little squares and triangles strewn around her on the floor.

The captain's annoyance was keen when he returned not an hour later and found that someone had gathered up these favourite toys of hers and stowed them away on a shelf beyond her reach. As he entered, she was on tip-toe stretching up vainly towards her vanished rainbows.

The captain questioned Ira, the only man who had been indoors.

Ira knew nothing about it. He said he had been at work in the boat-room. One of the boys might have come in by the back door without his knowledge. Perhaps they had put the things away, fearing the kid might lick the paint off—they were such old maids these days.

The captain, vexed at this assumption of authority, catechised the others. One and all



## PERIWINKLE

they denied any knowledge of the affair. Then for the first time Captain Sears could almost have doubted his men.

But that afternoon these doubts were dispelled. He found Periwinkle delightedly playing with a doll.

Now, if the station had lacked anything, it had lacked a doll. That was the one object above all others least likely to be found in this desert; yet here it was, pink and golden-haired, in Periwinkle's arms.

There was no need to ask questions this time. Neither Ira nor Jim, nor even Sam Coffin, who was queer and secretive, could have had a hand in this.

The next day brought an even more remarkable phenomenon. The captain, having left his charge clad in the sailor's shirt and socks, came back to find her proudly posing for him in a little white frock, and stockings that fitted, and even shoes.

If the clothes had been made for her, as

## PERIWINKLE

their fit suggested, someone must have worked themselves weary to get them done so soon. But the shoes? Someone must have crossed the miles of half-submerged treacherous waste to get to town—an undertaking which even these lusty life-savers would scarcely have dared to try.

It was noticeable that each of these surprising manifestations had occurred while the crew were at their drill or otherwise occupied. Under the circumstances it would not have been hard for an outsider to enter by the back way and visit the child uninterrupted.

Periwinkle herself could give no information. Her words at this stage applied only to inanimate objects like her "toat," and "tocks," or to vague impressions like that quavering "torm." She was impersonal and made the men feel quite downcast by evading all their efforts at teaching her their names.

The visitations were therefore a mystery, though one or two surmised the truth.

## PERIWINKLE

Throughout a general discussion in the mess-room that last night, it was Sam Coffin who held to the most unique theory.

“Maybe it’s the spirit,” he said solemnly, “of her dead mother.” And Ira, smoking his pipe and recalling that frail arm lifted above the waves by a love seemingly superhuman, could almost have believed it possible.

Late that evening Captain Sears went out on the beach and by the light of his lantern followed a line of footprints southward along the hard sand. In the morning he announced:

“Boys, you can say what you like, we’ll take the child over and present her to Ann Scudder.”

## VIII

THEY made the presentation with some ceremony. Captain Sears and three of his crew—Jim, Ira and Sam Coffin—conveyed Periwinkle to the beachcomber's.

The morning being fine, the men turned out as if for inspection, with freshly washed white shirts and trousers over their heavy serge, the keeper himself in his best blue uniform, with brass buttons fairly blazing in the sunlight.

Captain Sears led the way silently with the child in his arms, Jim, Ira and Sam close behind, three abreast, keeping step in their march along the beach, like a solemn bodyguard.

Periwinkle seemed to enjoy the procession. Evidently she held no grudge against the sea. As she caught sight of it now smiling at her radiantly in the morning sunlight, she smiled

## PERIWINKLE

back at it, then laughed in soft response and held out her hands towards the reaching ripples, as if to a mother's arms.

Her delight was so urgent that the captain set her down on the beach, and keeping her hand, let her look off from her small height over the water.

This sobered her. She showed no timidity, but only stared, her lips parted, her large eyes full of a grave wonderment and as blue as if inherited from the mother-sea herself.

While she watched, the sea's faint changes were hers, too; its eternal mobility was in her baby face; the stirring of its currents seemed to cross her eyes. When the ripples receded, she looked surprised and disappointed, wider-eyed, as if a toy was being taken from her. When they stole again to her feet, she smiled with their own sunny sparkle and clapped her hands.

It was as if the sea-mother played with her, had gone down on her knees to her, and was talking baby-talk that she could understand.

## PERIWINKLE

'At the last, she looked up at the captain and chirped like a young sand-piper, "Tea—tea!"

"Yes," he said sighing, "the sea;" and taking her again in his arms, went on faster than before.

"She don't remember," said Jim, "the way it treated her."

"I'll bet she's got sailor blood in her," said Ira.

Sam Coffin frowned. He had the dolorous air of a would-be poet.

"There's times," he muttered, "when I'd sell my immortal soul to be able to say the right thing. It's like diving down in yourself looking for a sunk cargo and bringing up just rubbish, and all the time the stuff you're after is there, you know it's there!"

They came to a halt behind one of the dunes flanking Ann Scudder's house, and held a council of war. In the midst of this they were interrupted by the beachcomber himself, who, as if divining their proximity by some sixth

## PERIWINKLE

sense, came peering around the dune and discovered them.

"How do, Cap," said he. "What's in the wind?"

"Eph, you have a nose for salvage," returned the keeper. "Now here's the prettiest souvenir you ever combed the beach for." He held up Periwinkle.

Ephraim made a wry grimace.

"H'm. Still alive, eh! What ye goin' to do with her?"

"She's got to have a home," said Captain Sears, "till we find out something about her. I suppose you'd be more interested if she was a piece of drift-wood."

The beachcomber eyed Periwinkle, and she drew back from him timidly under the shelter of the captain's arm.

"Huh, I don't know. D'ye remember thet cradle come ashore from the *Jennie B. Fuller*, ten year' ago? I always had a hankerin' to hev' thet put to use." He glanced back furtively over his shoulder in the direction of the

## PERIWINKLE

cottage and lowered his voice to a sort of wheezing whisper:

“Thet cradle’s enough to drive a man daft. She’s got it in her bedroom, and sometimes in the night she keeps me awake hours—rockin’ thet empty cradle! I can hear it goin’ an’ her kinder croonin’ over it. Durn it, Cap, it’s creepy! I’m afeared she’s gettin’ a little off.”

The surfmen glanced at one another comprehendingly. The captain smiled.

“Then, Eph,” said he, “this child ought to lie in that cradle, oughtn’t she?”

Eph inspected her closer, and Periwinkle, gaining courage, reached up a tiny hand to pull his long, straggling hair.

He jerked back with a chuckle.

“Seems as though she ought,” he replied. Then he frowned, and his face seemed to grow even more peaked than usual, and his voice sank to a whine. “But it’s goin’ to cost, and I’m poor.”

There was a chorused protest from the surfmen.

## PERIWINKLE

“Poor! Tell that to somebody else. You’ve got money tucked away. Anyhow we’ll chip in—all of us.”

He glanced at one and another with blinking eyes as if unaccustomed to the light of day.

“How much?”

Sam Coffin rose to the occasion.

“As much as Ann says she needs,” he answered shrewdly.

It was now arranged that Ephraim should go ahead as their ambassador to broach the matter to his daughter. He shambled off hastily to the house. As he entered he said to her:

“Ann, I heard you rockin’ thet empty cradle again only last night.” His voice had a maudlin note in it, perhaps his nearest approach to tenderness.

She laughed mirthlessly.

“Well, I’ve never lied to you about it. What if you did? If you’ve got ears, father, you can hear. If you’ve got a heart—” She turned away bitterly.

## PERIWINKLE

“Ann,” he remonstrated, “I hev got a heart, an’ I’ll show it! How’d you like to hev the care of a child?”

She turned quickly back to him, facing him, all at once tight-strung, her pallid cheeks flushed with sudden colour. Then the wave as swiftly ebbed, leaving her limp and paler than ever.

“You’re joking.”

“No, I ain’t. I mean the baby from the wreck.”

“Don’t they know anything about her?”—Ann’s face was strained—“her folks?” She waited breathless for his answer.

“Not a thing yet. Maybe they will any day, an’ maybe they never will.”

“Then I’d be taking awful chances.”

“How d’ye mean?”

“I mean—I mean—if they came and took her away from me—”

“That might happen if she was your own flesh. She might fall sick an’ die. Them’s the chances of all mothers.”

## PERIWINKLE

Ann's fingers were nervously playing about her lips, as if to choke back some inner cry, or to tear it forth. She bit her nails, and her flat bosom heaved.

"Come," said her father; "they're waitin' outside."

"What! Have they got her with them?"

"Yes."

She turned and paced the floor a moment, gaunt and silent as a man. At length she paused, half turned to him and said calmly, even coldly:

"All right, if they haven't any other place, I suppose we can give her shelter."

He went out, and the men under the dune saw him wave to them from the top.

They made their way around to the cottage.

Ann stood in the doorway, a figure of adamant. Her father shambled around the house, entered by a rear door and mixed himself a glass of gin and water.

"I thought," began the captain, addressing

## PERIWINKLE

Ann Scudder ceremoniously, "you might like  
—I mean, we want to ask—"

Her frigid manner embarrassed him, struck him dumb. He felt that she knew he suspected her of those visits to the station.

"Here, Sam," he said; "you're the speechifier."

Sam took the child in his arms and dived within himself for the stuff he knew was there, but as usual he brought up what he called rubbish.

"You see it's this way, Mrs. Scudder. Your husband got drowned in the sea, and now the sea sends back this—"

Ann shifted.

"I don't see any need of such talk."

Sam looked down dolefully at the child in his arms.

"We only wanted to make a little speech of presentation," he muttered in apology.

Ann smiled stoically, but the ordeal of waiting was too much for her. They saw her sway and lean against the door-post for support.

## PERIWINKLE

“Go on with it then.”

Ira fidgeted under the strain.

“Hurry up, Sam.”

Big Jim gave Sam a nudge that almost knocked him over with the baby in his arms.

Sam smiled rather vapidly at Ann Scudder.

“We call the child Periwinkle,” he said with a politeness meant to be propitiating.  
“Don’t you think that is a pretty name?”

“No; I call it fantastic.”

Periwinkle, wholly unconcerned at all that was passing, began uttering that soft little pigeon-like coo of hers as she peeped across at Ann from Sam’s arms. It was a coo of recognition.

The gaunt woman, trembling from head to foot, came out into the morning. Her hands were locked across her breast; her fingers worked with convulsive eagerness.

“Will you take the child?” asked Captain Sears.

She gave a sharp nod.

“I’d just as lief.”

## PERIWINKLE

Then Sam handed Periwinkle to her.

Once the baby was in her grasp, she swiftly turned without a word and vanished into the house, and they heard a sob break harshly from her.

That night the cradle was still empty but she did not rock it. She lay with the child in the hollow of her arm.

## IX

**A**NN SCUDDER had dared to gamble with destiny, and her courage had its reward. Sam Coffin by dint of deep intellectual travail contrived a sort of priestly decree:

“That which the sea hath given, let no man take away.”

Days dissolved into months, months into years, and Periwinkle grew up calling Ann “mother.”

Probably never before, even on the Cape, has a girl’s lot been as hers was. She matured into bloom amid hordes of wreckage; she was like a sea-anemone sprung from sea ruins.

Her fame spread and her queer beach name.

“Periwinkle, the girl they saved as a baby;”  
“Periwinkle, the beachcomber’s grandchild;”

## PERIWINKLE

“Periwinkle, the widow Scudder’s one ewe lamb;” “Periwinkle, the life-savers’ mascot, the Daughter of the Regiment”—this was the way they spoke of her all along Cape Cod, though her foster-mother had christened her Ann after herself and called her Nancy.

In the warm months the summer visitors used to drive out to the distant beaches to see her—city people from everywhere; but she was very shy and simple, and it soon became a proverb with the tourist that when you spoke to it, the periwinkle always crawled into its shell.

| The natives, too, came to see her, especially men—one or two Portuguese from Provincetown, and youths from Truro, Wellfleet, Orleans—some no doubt on mischief bent—loose lovers in which the Cape abounds. She became a lure to them, a dream image, far out on the desolate shore. There was enchantment in her story, her life, her personality, the contrast between her and her surroundings, and though her figure was like a young boy’s and

## PERIWINKLE

her face quaint rather than pretty, there was enchantment in these, too. She was somehow fraught with the sea-spirit; it whispered through her to their sea-loving hearts.

But she was well guarded both by her own nature and the protection of those with whom she lived. Ann played the true dragon in her behalf, and each man of the station had built within himself a shrine for her. The isolated little company worshipped her as simply and devoutly as old time monks their Lady of Heaven.

If some of them loved her much more humanly, which is not to be denied, they locked that, too, within them, waiting for her womanhood. They had saved her from the sea and had a prior claim before all outsiders. It seemed only fair that she should choose a surf-man.

In her girlhood, she spent hours at the station, mothering them, doctoring their ailments, listening to their yarns, watching them drill, learning the signal code and regulations, nurs-

## PERIWINKLE

ing ship-wrecked sailors, even assisting in the actual saving of life. She grew up one of them—a boy close to the corps, clever in the surf, wearing a man's oilskins and rubber boots in foul weather, loving life-saving for its own sake, a true Daughter of the Regiment.

Naturally enough she seemed born for one or another of them—the luckiest—whichever he might be.

They took little account of the disparity of years, they reckoned without her youth, without Fate, without the sea itself.

Weatherwise though they were, they could not prophesy the second great storm that broke on Crooked Bar, bringing ashore a solitary castaway—a man. Well as they knew her, they knew little of her woman's nature. They had held out rescuing arms to her in her babyhood, and she gave them a world of gratitude; but now it was to mean far more to her to hold out rescuing arms herself.

She was a girl overflowing with mercy.

## X

**T**HREE were three wrecks in a single evening. It was one of the busiest nights in the history of the service. First an old coastwise passenger steamer, the *Rutland*, made as if to ride straight across the Cape, and getting no further than the bar, stuck there with distress signals flying. Her captain was either drunk or obsessed by that unaccountable sea-devil which sometimes tricks the ablest navigator. He believed himself free of the Cape and heading for Boston, instead of which he was leagues off his course, his antiquated steamer racing for the bar like an old steeple-chaser for a hurdle.

The second victim was a lumber schooner from Boothbay, and the sea was thick with men clinging to planks from her cargo.

The third catastrophe that night befell a

## PERIWINKLE

vessel far off shore, seen but for a moment before the water swallowed her.

These different disasters occurred miles apart along the coast, the work devolving upon the crews of several stations. Nowadays the service enjoyed new advantages. Between the stations half-way houses had been erected for the use of patrolmen, and telephone wires had been strung along the beach.

To-night the electric bells clamoured in every station all the way from Monomoy to Race Point, patrols and keepers hastily reporting and conferring over the wires, the keepers, torn between calamities, finally demanding orders from their superintendent at Provincetown.

The order came to Crooked Bar:

“Concentrate on the *Rutland*. She’s carrying fifty passengers. I’m sending three crews. She’s ten miles northeast of you. You’ll have to let the other wrecks go.” And the superintendent, moving his pawns to the

## PERIWINKLE

succour of the vessel in direst need, rang off abruptly.

Thanks to his generalship and the labours of his subordinates, the *Rutland's* passengers were saved that night in breeches-buoys, life-cars, and surfboats, the vessel herself being ultimately floated off the bar.

As for the lumber schooner, more than half of her crew gained the beach, clinging to the planks cast loose from her cargo.

It was the third wreck—the sinking of the mysterious vessel far off shore—that altered the lives of those at Crooked Bar.

Periwinkle, as a rule, wandered out of an evening to meet the patrol. One of the half-way houses lay hidden among the dunes not far from her home. In this untenanted shelter she kept many a friendly tryst with one or another of the surfmen. Sometimes it was Jim, sometimes Ira, and sometimes queer Sam Coffin, the oddest and most impersonal of her suitors. Others of the Crooked Bar crew had been transferred to different stations, but these

## PERIWINKLE

three still remained with Captain Sears and had risen by promotion, respectively, to numbers one, two and three in the crew.

She also met at the half-way house the patrol from the station beyond—friends less intimate than her old benefactors, but nevertheless looked upon with favour because they were surfmen.

On this same night of disaster, she put on her oilskin coat, trousers, rubber boots and deep-brimmed rubber hat and went out to meet Ira. She knew he was patrolling from eight to ten this evening and should reach the half-way house at about nine.

When she set out the sky was still broken, the moon in its last quarter shedding a sudden light through great clefts in the clouds, only to be blotted out in a moment. On the sea these swift changes were intensified, the light and blackness tumbling together on its surface as if in a deadlier conflict.

As the dark gained sway the chill of the night increased rapidly and snow began to

## PERIWINKLE

fall, the wind driving it slantwise from the north. It flurried white and luminous about Periwinkle's lantern.

She knew nothing of the wrecks as yet, but she was glad she had not neglected to bring her lantern, the night began to look so dirty. She did not think of turning back. Her mother and grandfather would not worry. She had accustomed them to her love of storms and her independence—a sort of gradual enfranchisement, not assertive on her part or self-willed, but gained kindly, as the natural right of her nature.

No; they would not worry, and besides it would give Ira a moment of pleasure on his long wearisome trudge. Though he had developed into one of the cleverest men in the service, he had his moods and often needed heartening, she told herself. Moreover, it was he who, a mere novice, had risked his life to save her from the sea.

She gained the little half-way house and stood under the lee of it, waiting for Ira.

## PERIWINKLE

He did not come.

She waited until she knew it was long past his time, then wondering at his delay, she started along the top of the bluff in the direction of the station.

She was not really alarmed, but the bluff had its treacherous places—large blow-holes that might engulf a man, and if he had ventured too near the edge, there might have been a bad sand-slide, carrying him down into the surf.

As she hastened on she now and then swung her lantern to each side and ahead, examining the shifting surface of the sand.

She had gone perhaps a mile when a corner of her eye caught a sudden light. Turning, she pulled her rubber hat over her eyes and stared across the water.

She saw a wavering flare as if from a bonfire built far out on the sea. A small shapeless mass of flame quivered in the gloom. From the main blaze several red offshoots darted forth like streams of blood on the black sky.

## PERIWINKLE

The whole fire seemed to be moving nearer, growing bigger, brighter. She made out a mast, brilliant as a golden spear, and loose rigging, burning fuselike. In the midst of the glare a thing that looked like a smokestack glowed red as copper, and close to the gleaming rail there seemed to be small dark figures hurrying fore and aft in terror. One or two were already afire.

Suddenly there was a blinding flash, and the low dull sound of a distant explosion came booming heavily ashore. The vessel, lifted bodily into the air, was torn asunder in huge flaming fragments, her stays and halyards like fiery serpents writhing in the night.

Then, amid a storm of sparks, the blinding scarlet débris and the little puppetlike figures went showering down into the sea, and the night was even darker than before.

The girl, appalled by this calamity, hastened onward to the station for aid.

She now had to fight her way, matching her slim young body against the gale. She held

## PERIWINKLE

before her face one of the little short-handled flat-bladed paddles such as Jim and other surfmen used for protection; but the sleet, sand, and salt spray, came whirling around it, cutting her cheeks cruelly.

At last her hand, despite her rubber gauntlet, grew so cold that she could hold the paddle no longer. She tossed it aside, and the storm broke full in her face. She bent her little head to it and pressed her palm against her lantern for warmth. The snow froze on her oilskin suit, stiffening it till it crackled at each step.

But she had been out on many a stormy winter's night before and she had a fine supple strength in every limb and muscle. Had anyone seen her plodding through the storm in her yellow suit and big black hat and rubber boots, and with the lantern in her hand, they would have taken her for a young surfman on patrol duty.

She gained the bluff's end, and descending to the beach, kept to the hard sand within a

## PERIWINKLE

few feet of the surf. Here she made better time, but it took her in all an hour to go the mile from the scene of the burning ship to the station.

She found the station deserted, and realised that her comrades had been called away to some wreck further along the coast.

The storm was so violent that she thought of spending the night here at the station. But the terrible scarlet picture of the explosion had branded itself on her soul. She was helpless, but she could not stay idle. She had to keep on the go, had to return to the scene of the catastrophe. She must get home; it would be a relief to tell her mother and grandfather.

She was not emotional, she had seen so many wrecks. They were as much a part of her life as of the surfmen's lives. But this wreck was different, new, more appalling. She had never seen a ship afire; she had never witnessed any calamity alone; it had never been

## PERIWINKLE

so that she could not notify her friends and set the wheels of rescue in motion.

She started back, and the wind, catching her, drove her before it like a feather. She was borne along in a whirl of sleet and sand so swiftly that she could barely keep her foot-hold, and found herself forced to run—to try and outrun the gale—regardless of all pitfalls.

When she regained the bluff and the higher more exposed level, she was completely at the wind's mercy.

It lifted her off her feet and flung her to the sand. Panting, she stumbled up and let it sweep her on again, the lantern luckily still alight in her grasp.

Again the wind overcame her and she went down, and this time lay quiet a moment, struggling to regain her breath.

The lantern was on its side, the persistent little flame flaring and smoking the glass. Instinctively she reached out and managed to

## PERIWINKLE

right the lantern, drag it toward her, shelter it, and turn down the wick.

As she did so, the faint light fell across an object close ahead of her.

She half rose to her knees and crawled nearer.

At first she was dazed. The thick whirl of sand, sleet and spray so blurred the object that she could scarcely see it. But she had quick senses.

She knew that she was kneeling over the body of a man half buried in the sand.

Her wits were as quick as her eyes. This was almost the exact spot whence she had witnessed the disaster. If the body had been here then, she reasoned swiftly, she could not but have noticed it. So the sea had cast it up within the last two hours, had lifted it clean over the brow of the bluff and left it here.

The man lay in the sand, his head and one arm and shoulder wholly exposed. His matted hair was white with snow but showed dark beneath, and the arm and shoulder and as



“There was life in the man!”

THE NEW YORK  
PUBLIC LIBRARY

ALICE LENOX AND  
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

L



## PERIWINKLE

much of his chest as could be seen were bare. But there was no aspect of human flesh either in them or in his face. The sleet and sand imparted to him the grizzled look of death. The sand was in his ears and between his locked lips and even under his eyelashes. His fingers clutched a handful of it beside him.

The girl drew off one of her gauntlets, and groping through the sand across his breast, held her palm on his heart. She felt a faint throb.

A low cry, like a moan, broke from her.

There was life in the man!

## XI

PERIWINKLE brushed the sand from the man's face, smoothed back his hair, and drawing off her other gauntlet, rubbed his temples a moment with both hands.

He was not a victim of drowning. He had evidently kept above water. He had none of the bloated look she had often seen. He was suffering from exhaustion, exposure. To escape the bitter inclemency of the night he had burrowed into the sand with a blind instinct for shelter not uncommon in men shipwrecked on sandy shores.

She touched his chest and shoulder and found them very cold. Kneeling upright, she pulled off her oilskin coat and a woollen sweater that she was wearing underneath; then she put on her coat again and wrapped

## PERIWINKLE

the warm sweater about him, tucking it under the exposed shoulder. She next scooped up the sand under his head for a pillow.

It was impossible to move him, he was buried so solidly in the bluff.

She fell to shovelling the sand away from him with her hand, and before long had freed him from the bank's grip.

He was naked save for an undershirt in rags, and a pair of trousers. The undershirt was scorched, and several blackened particles fluttered away as she released him.

She rubbed his arms violently and chafed his feet with her palms. He was utterly without warmth. She found it impossible to start any circulation. If he was not already dead, he was dying.

Oh, if she only had a flask of brandy—one drop of some heating stimulant—anything to break this lifeless chill!

Somehow she must get him to the station where these restoratives were kept, where he would have warmth, dry clothes and a bed.

## PERIWINKLE

But that was impossible unless he could be at least partly revived.

As she worked over him the conviction grew in her that it was all in vain; and her heart, so often melting with a love of saving lives from the sea as hers had been saved, seemed to rise in her throat, choking her.

She uttered a second low moan, a sob.

Then suddenly, with a desperate effort to succour him, with a final outpouring of that quality in her which was pure mercy unspoiled by the world, she unbuttoned her coat, parted it wide, and leant close and closer to him till at last she was on his breast, warmly covering him, like a dove brooding on its young.

She gave herself wholly to this last attempt at resuscitation. Her natural mercy was not a passive charity; it was practical, active, even aggressive. Her arms went around him and she grasped him tightly to her, pouring into him her life-breath, her young warmth.

The storm seemed to centre on them. The sand and sleet whipped them like a thousand

## PERIWINKLE

lashes; the wind all but broke her desperate clasp and swept the two asunder; the salt spray repeatedly drenched them; the explosions of the surf against the bluff were terrific.

But for once the very fury of the elements had a certain kindness in it. It was this tempest and the limitless darkness that made the girl's act possible, natural.

No virgin saint could have done otherwise; indeed, the saintlier the soul, the more inevitable that hot embrace. It was sheer love —a love as far above individual passion as the hidden stars were above the surf. Periwinkle was like that ineffable lady who nursed at her breast the ragged starving old man.

As the girl lay on him she felt him grow slowly warmer under her until at last a tremor ran through his whole frame.

She rose to her knees beside him, caught up the lantern and examined his face.

The grizzly pallor was leaving it. His lips had already lost their grey parched look. She had pressed her own against them.

## PERIWINKLE

She waited breathless, kneeling close to windward, sheltering him. There was nothing more to do at the instant. She knew by experience that it was now either the last flicker before death, or the first rekindling of life.

His lids slowly lifted and his eyes stared up blankly at the black vault overhead. Then the light of her lantern must have gradually stolen through the darkness of his mind.

His eyes turned toward the lantern. Its light glimmered on her yellow oilskins.

Very slowly his gaze followed the reflection upward to her face. He stared blankly into the shadows under her deep-brimmed surferman's hat.

The light must have revealed her eyes to him. Slowly there came into his own that understir, that subtle, gradual taking on of living expression, which comes to the eyes of the human being who wakes from lonely death to find himself guarded by one other human being.

## **PERIWINKLE**

**For a moment the girl was blinded by tears, and they were in her voice when she spoke to him.**

**“You’re better. You’ll live. Oh, if we can only get to the station!”**

## XII

WHEN at last she had helped him to his feet and buttoned the sweater like a cape about his shoulders, she said:

“Lean on me. That’s the way. You’re all right.”

They stumbled forward against the gale. She could say little, the sand-blast choking back her words, but the little she did say was full of pluck and encouragement.

In one hand she held the lantern, the other was around him, supporting him, guiding him safely past the blow-holes and sudden fissures in the bluff.

He had an arm over her shoulders. Although he seemed to bear very lightly on her there were moments when his strength all but failed and she staggered under his weight.

## PERIWINKLE

Several times the wind struck them so furiously that it drove them backwards and they had to stop, he hanging on her in a half swoon, she panting and aching, but determined to keep him on his feet.

For the most part she was tender with him, but once or twice she had to be severe to try and stimulate his stricken will-power. In this she soon succeeded. By the time they had descended from the bluff and gained the long wide beach, the man began to show a spirit equal to her own.

He insisted on trying to walk independently of her and went lurching into the teeth of the storm, refusing her arm. He must have had great natural endurance, she thought —wonderful recuperative capacity and grit.

The station was still empty, keeper and crew still busy with the *Rutland*, miles away.

“Where are we?” he asked, as she opened the door. They were his first words and spoken so faintly that she only divined them.

## PERIWINKLE

"The Crooked Bar Life-Saving Station," she told him, guiding him through the mess-room. "It seems too good to be true."

She helped him upstairs to the end of the dormitory partitioned off for the shipwrecked. Here there were several iron cots with neat bedding, sheets and blankets, ready turned down.

The exertion of the walk had been too much for him. He sank exhausted on the nearest cot.

She went to a medicine closet, procured a flask of brandy, and supporting his head on her arm, poured some of the spirits between his lips. This partly revived him, but he lay as he was, his ragged clothes wet and caked with sand.

She went to a row of lockers and took out some of the flannel clothing provided for castaways. Leaving this with him, she went downstairs to have an eye to the fire in the cook-stove. When she returned to him she found that he had managed to change his soaked

## PERIWINKLE

clothing for the warm flannels and was lying in bed. She tucked the sheets and blankets snugly under him.

As she did so he opened his eyes and looked at her, and then for the first time she felt a certain bashfulness, a faint warmth in her cheeks. But his words were surprisingly reassuring.

"I never realised," he said, "that you life-savers were so wonderful." His eyes brightened with a feeble smile of gratitude. "You're the best boy that ever lived."

He thought she was a young surfman.

She felt relieved. She was glad of her oil-skin trousers, rubber boots and coat, glad she had been too busy to remove her large rubber hat.

She caught sight of her sweater, the feminine cut of which he had luckily not noticed. She hid it in the locker. Then she went clumping downstairs very surfmanlike, heated some water and beef-juice on the stove and brought him back a piping hot beverage.

## PERIWINKLE

Turning down the dormitory lamp, she sat on the side of his bed and fed him awkwardly, as she had seen Jim and Ira feed other shipwrecked men on this same cot.

The warm extract put him in a glow. His voice grew stronger. When she put aside the empty cup he said:

“You’re a better man than I am.” Then once more he closed his eyes and she noticed a cloud passing over his face. But gradually a look of peace settled on him and she saw that he was falling into a natural sleep.

She went downstairs again, heated another cup of the beef broth and drank it. She was practical; she had method, divine common sense. It would not do to collapse herself—yet awhile.

She looked at the clock. It was two in the morning. Her mother and grandfather must be very anxious. She had never been out so late. But they would doubtless reason that she had sought shelter in the station. Be that

## PERIWINKLE

as it might, she could not return home till she had turned over her charge to Captain Sears. Her duty lay here.

She reascended the stairs and sat beside the bed of the sleeping man in the bare dormitory. Outside, the storm raged about the desolate little station, the surf crashing on the beach, the sand scraping furiously against the windows.

Once or twice she looked at the man's face and quickly away again as if fearful lest he should detect her.

He was young. Now that life was flowing back into him, bringing healthy colour and smoothing out the storm's sudden ravages, she saw that he was younger than any of her friends. He had, too, a look unlike the surf-men. Under the shaded lamp his face was clearer cut than their faces, his features finer; and his hand on the blanket, though strong-looking, was less rough, better shaped.

She did not consciously draw comparisons.

## PERIWINKLE

If she had they would have loyally favoured her weather-beaten old friends. It was only that she received a new impression.

She rarely wondered about her birth and parentage, time had so firmly established their obscurity; they were so utterly blank. But to-night as she sat guarding this man, the mystery, perhaps for the first time in her life, troubled her. She had always been contented as Ann Scudder's daughter, so unthinkingly happy near her beloved sea, so engrossed in the lives of her friends the surfmen that until now she had scarcely ever regretted that she was in fact only a foundling. She had no desire for other surroundings. Summer people, with their talkative city ways, she had always fled from, though her foster-mother, the erstwhile schoolmistress, had educated her fairly well.

It was only that to-night as she sat here at this young stranger's bedside, something awoke in her a new regret. Curiously enough, the disquieting cause was the sight of this

## PERIWINKLE

hand of his lying motionless on the blanket.

The sound of the wind outside fell to a moan that was like grief after anger, and the sand scraped less frenziedly against the windows.

She sat on, stiff and aching in her oilskins, boots and hat. The weight of the hat was almost intolerable, but if she removed it and he awoke, he would see her hair. She was all the more determined now to retain her disguise.

He stirred once, and she leaned forward to see if he suffered. In his sleep he groped for her hand, and finding it, held it fast as if dimly recalling its beneficence.

She quivered with timidity. Would the texture of her skin, her hand's littleness, penetrate his dream and betray her?

She was too kind to draw it away, the feel of it seemed to comfort him so.

He held it a long time—so long that in the end the situation was strangely reversed. She was so tired that she found herself taking a

## PERIWINKLE

certain solace from that clasp, instead of only giving solace. In the end she was so miserable that it was she who was clinging to the sleeper instead of he to her.

She felt faint and might have lost consciousness but for an outer sound that aroused her. It was the familiar rattle of the beach-waggon that held the surfboat.

She stole from the bedside and downstairs. She met the men at the doorway of the boat-room. They were amazed at seeing her. She managed to smile down at them from the door-sill.

“Where’ve you been? I thought you were never coming.”

“We had a tough job down the beach a ways,” said Captain Sears. “Why—”

“Why am I here? Because I had a tough job, too.”

The life-savers crowded to her, their up-turned faces dazed and wondering in the light from the boat-room.

“A man got washed up from a burning

## PERIWINKLE

ship.” Her glance evaded theirs a moment, resting on the wide gleaming steel tires of the beach-waggon. “He was nearly gone, but—”

The surfmen’s faces were lit now not only by the boat-room lamps. Their eyes, upraised to her, shone with worship.

“But I managed to bring him to. He’s upstairs asleep. Be careful not to wake him.”

Captain Sears rested a hand on her shoulder, then passed silently into the boat-room. Jim also went by her with feelings too deep for words. As Ira passed her she heard him exclaim to himself, “Periwinkle!” as if the very name staggered him. And Sam Coffin was whispering something foolish about angels from heaven.

She turned to them as they housed the boat, and drawing the captain aside, whispered in his ear:

“He thinks I’m a man. Promise you won’t tell him I’m not, and make the others promise.”

He nodded, wondering, and she slipped away by another door before they could offer

## PERIWINKLE

to take her home. She knew they were worn out.

Her mother and grandfather, when they returned home from searching for her, found her already there. She lay huddled on the floor near the kitchen stove in a dead faint. She was still in her oilskins, but her rubber hat had fallen off, releasing her hair, which fell loose about her shoulders, brown and gleaming like wet seaweed.

## XIII

**A**NN put the girl to bed and kept her there the next day. She did not censure her, the heroic rescue absolving her from all blame.

Ann Scudder, moreover, had been softened by her years of motherhood. Her maternal thirst had been miraculously assuaged that day when they had brought the little cast-away to her; and ever since then she had been a woman satisfied. Although she was over sixty, she looked in a way younger than in her childless days. Her grey hair softened her face, and the old angular flatness of her figure had rounded as if the constant gratification of her motherly desires had found fruition in her body as well as in her soul.

There was still another reason why she did not censure Periwinkle. The girl, though al-

## PERIWINKLE

ways daughterly, seemed to possess a divine right of independence. She had been adopted whether she would or no, and behind that thick night in which the sea had cast her up, there lay, as behind a veil, various inheritances of nature which it would have seemed a sacrilege to tamper with or cross.

“So you dug him out of the sand,” mused Ann, pondering on the girl’s face.

They were in Periwinkle’s bedroom, a small upper chamber far more neatly arranged than the rest of the beachcomber’s curious abode. The bare walls were white; the room was simply furnished. An iron cot, painted white, two straight-backed chairs, a washstand, and a table with a white framed mirror hanging over it—that was all. But each piece was fresh and white. The muslin curtains and the towel on the table and on the wall above the washstand were all snowy and looked as if just from the ironing-board.

The sun, streaming in at the window, seemed at home in this room.

## PERIWINKLE

The girl lay in bed, though she had quite recovered from her collapse. It was the morning following the rescue.

“So you dug him out and half carried him to the station and put him to bed like a trained nurse. Well, I never! You ought to be number one in the crew.” Ann was so relieved at having Nancy back, so pleased by the signs of immediate recovery, that she grew even facetious. “You ought to apply for Captain Sears’s job as keeper. He’s near the age limit. They retire him soon.”

“Yes; don’t talk about that,” said Periwinkle. “Poor Captain Sears!”

Ann sat contentedly darning her daughter’s stockings—stockings always sadly in need of it, thanks to the wearer’s endless roaming on the beaches. There was happiness even in mending these holes since Nancy’s feet had made them.

Ann shook her head with cheerful sympathy for Captain Sears. Then she reverted to the newer subject.

## PERIWINKLE

“Speaking of ages, Nance—how old is this man you rescued?”

“I don’t know.”

“Is he young?”

“Yes—young.”

Ann nodded.

“Must have been. I guess his youth saved him. Frozen, was he? How on earth did you bring him to with no medicines?”

The girl shifted in bed without answering. Her lips were sealed. That was her way. She seldom or never evaded; she either spoke truth or said nothing. This was one of those moments when Ann instinctively felt the presence of the girl’s sacred inheritances—the veiled shrine, with its mysteries; and she did not press her question.

Periwinkle glanced off between the muslin curtains at her window. From where she lay she could see a patch of blue sky.

“It’s clearing, mother. Why shouldn’t I go over to the station?”

“What for?”

## PERIWINKLE

“To find out how he is.”

“After all you went through last night?  
Not you!”

In these material emergencies Ann's devotion saw no baffling veil between herself and her adopted daughter. She could even play the despot, her hard character being the strong warp and woof fibres over which lay the wonderful glowing pattern of her mother-love.

“I suppose,” said Periwinkle, “*you* couldn't go to see how he is, could you? The tide's low now, and you could walk on the hard sand all the way. Maybe I oughtn't to ask you.”

For a moment Ann wore a faint trace of her cold look of long ago. It was the merest ghost of her old wintriness. Her eyes were intent on her darning.

“I don't mind you asking, Nancy; but I wouldn't leave you this day for any man, dead or alive.”

“Couldn't grandfather go?”

Ann looked up in surprise.

“Bless me, what are you thinking of? You

## PERIWINKLE

know he's too old. Nothing gets him to the beach nowadays except a first class wreck."

"Then I suppose I'll have to wait till the patrol comes. It'll be Jim to-night. You'll keep a lookout for his lantern, mother, won't you, and meet him at the half-way house and get the news?"

Ann nodded silently. The girl was looking off again through the window and the blue of the sky was in her eyes, and something of its remoteness.

"This young feller you saved," said Ann, "what kind of a man is he?"

Nancy slightly shook her head without altering her distant gaze. The faint motion implied that she could not define him.

"Is he what you'd call a handsome man?"

The same motion, not in negative reply, but implying the same vagueness of definition.

Ann drew out her wooden darning egg, rolled up the stocking, and stuck her needle in the ball of cotton.

"Can't you describe him at all?"

## PERIWINKLE

The girl was looking out at the sea. There was still a deep roll to it, the great after-heave of the storm. The reflected sunshine rose and fell with the vast movement. The wind had veered to the northwest and was pushing down over the horizon a line of haze that seemed like battle-smoke in the wake of a retreating squadron.

The sea's slow heaving recalled to Periwinkle the motion of the man's breast against her own as she had warmed him into life; and the sunlight across it was like his later smile as he said to her, "You're the best boy that ever lived."

Even the far haze suggested him. It was like the passing cloud on his face as he said, "You're a better man than I am."

He was different from all the men that she had known. He had a look less easily to be read; he was less simple. And yet she felt that this new mystery of his was not beyond her—she was somehow akin to it as she was akin to the sea.

## PERIWINKLE

“I was asking,” said Ann patiently, “if you couldn’t describe him?”

“No, I’m afraid I can’t,” replied Periwinkle, still gazing over the water.

Ann tried to smile, but said no more. She left the room and went downstairs, out into the morning.

Her father was seated by the door, basking in the sunshine. He was very old now—almost eighty—and had gained in dignity. His long sparse hair hung white as snow over the shoulders of his rusty coat. He was no longer able to scour the beach for wreckage, save at rare intervals. The sea which he had pillaged, had finally shackled him with rheumatism. He was quite infirm and when he walked needed support. Of late years it had been a hobby of his to split up into walking-sticks some of the fragmentary spars secured from wrecks. He had made perhaps fifty of these crude canes, and though Ann had suggested sending them to the village to be sold, he kept them to himself. Secreting them in the barn, he derived

## PERIWINKLE

much satisfaction from the choice, each morning, of one or another for that day's use.

He was leaning on one of these sticks now; sitting forward as alert old men do, with his hands crossed on it under his beard.

In his loose-hanging clothes, greenish brown and shiny with years of wear, he fitted in well with the yardful of wreckage around him. He was fast sinking into that decay which had so long delighted him—sinking into it harmoniously, himself the crowning wreck.

“How is she?” he asked without moving.

Though his eyes still had their peculiar peering acuteness, his ears were failing, so Ann answered loudly:

“Better.”

He nodded with satisfaction.

Ann gazed over the ocean through the opening in the bluff. A deep sigh escaped her.

He heard it. Often he could hear a whisper where he would have missed a spoken word. Perhaps it was because he had so long listened

## PERIWINKLE

for the first stirring of the sand, the general whispering of nature before a storm.

“What’s wrong wi’ ye?” he asked.

She did not know exactly. Her answer was ambiguous and prophetic.

“The sea gives,” she said, “and the sea takes away;” and turning abruptly, she went into the house to cook dinner.

He grunted irritably, thinking she referred to the loss of his activity.

That night Ann met Jim at the half-way house and brought back to Periwinkle news of the castaway.

He had fever and they had driven inland for a doctor. The doctor said the exposure had brought on a severe cold and there was danger of pneumonia.

At daybreak the next morning the girl hastened to the life-saving station.

## XIV

HE visited him every day that week; and each time before she went upstairs to him, she took the precaution to put on one of the rubber suits and hats hanging in the hall. This disguise, though, was scarcely necessary, his feverish condition keeping him inert and unnoticing.

Occasionally he spoke to her, asking what day it was, what the doctor said; but his words were rambling and the sharp pains in his chest rendered conversation difficult.

Once he asked her name and she told him it was Scudder, and thereafter whenever he spoke it was, "Scudder this," and "Scudder that"—"Scudder, am I going to live or die?"—"Scudder, it would be too bad if I died, after all your trouble, now wouldn't it?"

"Yes, yes—but you won't!"

## PERIWINKLE

“Perhaps not, but what’s the odds? Scudder, you life-savers know it doesn’t matter much. You see men die by the dozen. Do you think it’s worth while trying to save them?”

“Yes, I do think so.”

“You do, do you? Well, Scudder, do you know what you are? You’re a glorious young fool!”

The next day when she came up to him he lay with his eyes closed, but he was awake, and without looking at her seemed to feel her identity.

“Scudder, my boy, I’m worse this morning. My brain goes off half-cock. Do you think I’m more feverish? Feel me.”

She touched his forehead. It was even hotter than before.

His fever reached its climax that day, and she sat with him for hours. The doctor said it was not pneumonia but acute bronchitis, and he needed every care. There was much to do. She had to give him medicines at stated intervals and take his temperature; she had to

## PERIWINKLE

rub his chest with oils, turn his pillows, smooth his sheets and in every way look to his comfort.

She did all this with a bashful tenderness that was lost on him.

“What’s the good?” he kept saying. “Don’t bother. I tell you the game’s not worth the candle.”

Toward noon he grew very talkative, ranging this way and that, along the borders of delirium. He reviewed at random people and scenes of which she knew nothing; but every now and then she caught glimpses of the disaster.

“Well, why shouldn’t a man put his yacht into commission in December? What’s a yacht meant for?—to sail in a bath-tub? What’s a man meant for?—God knows. . . .

“Morty, old chap, you’re a devil . . . you’re my dear little bad angel, Morty—my evil genius . . . look out, Morty, you threw that cigarette down into the cabin . . . no, it didn’t blow overboard. . . . Are you sure? Look out you don’t go after

## PERIWINKLE

it. Lord, she's tipping! Feel sick, Morty? What do you want?—more champagne? Call Henry then.—No, go below. Gad, it's blowing!"

He shifted in bed and suddenly grew tense. "Wait, Morty! what's that smell? Fat?—Fat on the galley stove. Oh, you're always complaining about my stewards, Morty. You're the most fastidious—my God! We're afire!"

He sat up in his cot, looking down over the edge of it, horror struck.

"The whole cabin! Fire! Fire!" he called, and covering his eyes with his hand, shut out the remembered blaze and fell back on his pillow. Beads of perspiration stood out on his brow, and the girl wiped them away with her handkerchief.

"Don't, don't!" she gently implored him. "Please try to lie quiet; it's all right now."

Her touch and voice drew him out of his dreams for a moment, and he smiled.

"Scudder, what have I been saying?"

## PERIWINKLE

“You were telling me about the accident.”

“Oh, yes—have they found Morty, or any of the crew?”

“Not yet.”

He uttered a groan.

“Did I tell you how Morty, with the flames all about us, said, ‘It’s too bad this happened before I got my champagne. I wouldn’t have minded so much if—’ Then came the explosion. The fire had reached our boilers. Think of it! That burning yacht all from a spark from Morty’s cigarette!” He closed his eyes and his voice fell waveringly; he was trailing off again to the borderland. “Think of it, Scudder—that beautiful burning yacht all from a spark from Morty’s cigarette . . . like a crimson flower from a seed.” . . .

He turned on his side, trying in vain to get comfortable.

“Poor Morty, his cigarettes would have killed him sooner or later, anyway—or driven him crazy, like me.” He sank into a heavy sleep.

Nancy shivered. She softly crossed to the

## PERIWINKLE

stove. Crouching before it, she held out her hands to its warmth, gazing wistfully through the isinglass at the glowing coals. It was as though she dimly saw in them, for the first time, the heart of man.

## XV

“**T**AKE off that infernal hat, Scudder,  
and let me have a look at you.”

It was a morning several days later. The last vestiges of fever had left him the previous night, and after ten hours of natural sleep he had awakened a new man.

Luckily for her the day was rainy, affording her an excuse to appear once more in her storm-clothes.

She was standing at his bedside looking down at him with satisfaction, noting his recovery.

She had folded her arms to hide her hands. Now that his brain and senses were clear she knew the need of redoubled caution. How long she could retain the rôle of a man she did not know. With luck she might do it a day or two longer—long enough to keep him in igno-

## PERIWINKLE

rance of her sex until he went away. This was her one object, that he should leave without knowing, because she could not be sure how much he remembered of that long moment on the sand in the heart of the storm.

“Scudder, will you please take off your hat?”

“Why?”

“So I can see you, of course. I hope you don’t think I meant as a mark of respect—no, keep it on! If there’s any salaaming to be done, it’s I who ought to do it to you. Sit down a moment. I want to talk to you. Jove, how much it means to feel one’s thoughts run smooth again! Here.”

He made a place for her beside him on the cot, but she seated herself at his feet.

“You’re a splendid lot of men, Scudder. I’ve been holding a sort of reception up here this morning. How you can stand the loneliness beats me.”

He turned toward the window and glanced off over the shore. From where he lay he could not see the ocean—only the endless dismal

## PERIWINKLE

waste drearier than ever now in the rain. The dunes, faintly outlined in the drizzle, added if possible to the immensity of the solitude.

He turned back to her, visibly depressed.

“Is there anything in this life here?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean is the game worth the candle?”

She nodded affirmatively, always keeping her speech as laconic as possible lest her voice betray her sex.

He was silent a moment, then he said:

“You boys seem contented enough—except Captain Sears. The captain shows the effect of the life. How long has he been in the service?”

“Nearly forty years.”

“Forty years! My Lord! No wonder he has the blues! The man’s face looks despairing.”

“They retire him,” she said, “very soon now.”

“Do they? That ought to cheer him up. He’ll go home to some comfortable town and live on his pension.”

## PERIWINKLE

She averted her face and shook her head sadly.

“There is no pension.”

“What!” he exclaimed, sitting up in bed; “no pension? That’s incredible, inhuman! Do you mean to say our government—”

She nodded.

He muttered an oath and dropped back on his pillow.

“And yet,” he exclaimed, “he wouldn’t take a cent!”

“You offered him money?”

“Yes—and a thousand dollars to divide among the crew. What do you think he said? No, he was just as obliged, ‘but that would take the cream off.’ ”

She acquiesced with that quaint nod of hers.

“So it would.”

The man grew restless in his bed—even irritable.

“Look here, Scudder, don’t be a fool. With you it’s different. You did all the rescue work

## PERIWINKLE

as far as I'm concerned. Now you've got to let me pay you. Look at me!"

She turned facing him and her glance fell. She was chilled by his talk of money; he had unconsciously wounded her to the quick.

"Scudder," he insisted, "what's the use of false pride? You saved me and I'm rich. Name your price."

She rose from the bed trembling, choking back a protest.

He caught her arm and forced her to sit down again.

"Oh, well, if you take it that way, let it go. I'll send you something. My life isn't worth such a lot, anyway. But you do beat the dickens! In my world they don't refuse money—not by a long sight!"

He lay back again and closed his eyes; his voice fell.

"You don't know my world, Scudder. Thank your stars for that. It's hell. I was cast up here out of it, like Jonah out of the whale's belly. Those flames on the yacht were

## PERIWINKLE

the fires at the mouth of as real a hell as ever was."

She saw his face cloud, and a look sadder than any sign of physical suffering settled about his mouth and closed lids.

"Scudder, you don't know; you can't imagine—thank God! In the last few days I've lived my life all over again. My delirium lighted it up like a torch. I saw it all crooked, jumbled, garish; but not much more so, I suppose, than it's really been."

The quiet remorse and sorrow in his tone thrilled her. He was unconsciously playing on some unguessed string in her nature. She felt it vibrate.

"Scudder," he said, "I'm blessed if I know why I'm maundering like this. I'm not given to serious talk; it doesn't go down with my crowd—but you're different; you're a hermit in a desert—and I've had such a deucedly close call!"

"Yes," she said, very quietly. "If it does you good, tell me more."

## PERIWINKLE

He lay silent a moment then he said:  
“Scudder, there are all kinds of shipwrecks,  
all kinds of shoals, storms and fires.”

She made no reply; but she moved closer to him. She felt that here was suffering such as she had never ministered to. It began to awake deeper sympathies in her, more obscure capacities.

“Scudder,” he said, “the Atlantic’s a drop of water compared with another ocean. Davy Jones is a saint from Heaven compared to other devils I’ve rubbed up against. Their name is Legion. You saved me from Davy; but who on earth can save a man from Legion—a man hopelessly adrift?”

Before she knew it she was on her knees beside him. He had drawn on her inexhaustible sympathy.

“Scudder,” he said, with a smile for what he took to be the impulse of a generous youth; “Scudder, take my advice—one thing above all others: keep away from women. I’m not speaking of the grosser attractions. Those are

## PERIWINKLE

bad enough. I'm speaking of their innate cruelty, their littleness, their maddening inconsistency. They have no hearts, Scudder, no humanity."

She drew back a trifle. For the first time in her life she was more than a boy; her sex became all at once significant to her. He was belittling it and his attack fanned it into flame. He had vitally touched her womanhood.

"They're a cold lot," he said in conclusion, "a mercenary lot. That's the one reason why I envy you boys—you live apart from them."

He opened his eyes and smiled at her with hard irony and cynicism.

It was more than she could stand. She had a curious instinct as of self-preservation. Still kneeling, she unbuttoned her coat and threw it aside, disclosing her bodice; then took off her hat and laid it on the bed. Her hair, which had been pent up under it broke loose and fell about her shoulders even to his pillow.

He was not a man to show amazement; the transformation only silenced him. He did not

## PERIWINKLE

say a word for some time. He merely touched her hair and looked up into her eyes bewilderedly. Then he said:

“My God! I take it all back!”

The surfmen already noticed a difference in her. Their primitive devotion made them quick to feel the subtlest change. Like most men close to the elements and isolated from an intricate society, they received elemental impressions on the instant and were at no pains to conceal them.

When she came downstairs that evening from the intruder's bedside, they were sitting dumb, one or two making a pretence of reading, others puffing thoughtfully at their pipes.

On her way through the mess-room she paused, wondering why they were so gloomy.

“Ira, what are you thinking about?” she asked.

He blew forth a dense cloud of tobacco smoke, screening his face.

“I ain't sure,” he answered, moodily. “I

## PERIWINKLE

have a notion I was remembering that morning when Jim and me first brought you here, and Jim was going to give you a fried egg, but I said you must have a boiled one. Think of giving a baby a fried egg!"

They all tried to laugh but they were not of the world that simulates laughter easily.

Big Jim, tipping back his chair, spread his legs out beside the stove and stuck his hands in his trousers' pockets. He was gazing through the isinglass at that little patch of red that seemed to fascinate so many of these people.

"Queer," he said nodding; "I was remembering that, too."

## XVI

THE castaway stayed at the station four days more. On the second morning he went out to see the surfboat drill; on the third he saw the men practice the methods required in the resuscitation of the apparently drowned; on the fourth he witnessed the drill with the beach-apparatus, and that last morning was the most memorable.

The dawn had been misty, the sea lying under a veil like a vast cobweb; but a southerly breeze soon brushed this aside, leaving the day clean and shining.

The castaway had by now fully recovered. He stood outside witnessing the drill. With keen interest he watched the apparatus drawn out from the boat-room, saw everything rapidly made ready, the white-clad crew attacking the apparatus like artillery-men unlimbering a

## PERIWINKLE

cannon; saw the sand-anchor fixed in position, the faking-box opened and placed, the Lyle gun loaded with its whip-carrying projectile, each man quick at his special duty, yet all perfectly in concert—then he saw the gun fired.

The station flag-pole, some way off, did service as the imaginary distant mast of a wrecked vessel. One of the crew stood on a crosstree near the top of the pole, waiting.

Captain Sears aimed true. The whip fell exactly over the crosstree. In an instant the man had it and was hauling out the hauser and breeches-buoy. In another moment they landed him safely.

The onlooker applauded. He was deeply impressed by the sharp alertness of this work. It stimulated him, made him restless. These surfmen had acquired discipline and efficiency. It mattered not that their task was manual, simple; it demanded a capacity for service and rapid routine in which he, a man of a so-called higher intelligence, was utterly lacking. These fellows were fore-handed. They

## PERIWINKLE

trained themselves in advance to cope with emergencies. When the storm broke they would be ready for it. They would not smother in the breakers nor yet be duped by the undertow's treachery. They would stand firm, like practised infantry, to meet the charge of the sea-horses.

He admired them, envied them; they had resolved life into such simple terms.

His recent long days in the upper room had afforded him ample chance for introspection. He had been more at the mercy of his thoughts than for years, and the result was a mind troubled by regret—a general uneasiness of spirit.

He strolled away from the station this last morning to be once more alone with these thoughts before returning to civilisation. The instinct led him deep into the trackless waste.

The day was warm and sunny—one of winter's gracious interludes. He wandered on and on so long that when at last he paused, for the first time conscious of his surroundings,

## PERIWINKLE

the station lay far behind him, hidden by a sandhill.

He glanced at the ocean. It was very smooth. There was none of the flash and froth of windy mornings. The sea's bosom was not hidden to-day by sparkling jewels and fluttering laces. She lay bathed in silver as if in a calm dream; and the rise and fall of her breathing was visible on her bare breast.

That wonderful rhythm oppressed him. He was somehow not in time with it.

He turned to the landward scene, and now for the first time he faced the full panorama of this desert.

He was appalled. The sheer beauty of it awed him. He was impressed as if with a limitless unreality. It was as if he had been set down on another star—a planet dead and empty though still flooded with the sun's light.

The desert was mainly saffron—cloth of gold; but here and there the gold was alloyed with a reddish copper flush; and in places, veins

## PERIWINKLE

of black sand crossed it like scars burned into it by torches.

At various distances rose the dunes, and it was these that seemed most to isolate him from the human earth. They were now sharply outlined. The winds had carved them on a gigantic scale, yet there seemed to be something in their majesty which random winds could never have imparted. They seemed fraught with unimaginable meanings; shapes lurked in their shapelessness. They were of varying colours in the sunlight—saffron, orange, purple—but each had its own distinctive, though unnameable, form.

They were at once suggestive and baffling, these dunes. They filled him with a lost feeling. It was like a dream—not a nightmare, but a dream at high noon, full of golden phantasmagoria.

The shapes were surely likenesses of strange creatures—crumbling statues carved and left on this dead planet by the sculptors of a dead race.

## PERIWINKLE

He tried to forget the shapes of the dunes in the colouring of the whole scene.

He was not an artist, but he had once had a painter's ambitions. He could not but feel the unusual colours, the underlying golden hues, the pale gold, the orange gold, the coppery gold, and then the subtler overtones—the traces of green and silver where sparse salt grasses struggled for life; the mauve, magenta and purple of the sand, all different in different lights and distances under the pale blue sky. He was conscious, too, of the veins of black sand, the streaks of brownish poverty grass, grey black stubble and sombre elderberry scarring the landscape with ugly scorched places, like torch-burns.

The entire strange symphony fascinated him, but the golden dunes still rose from it all like harp-notes from an orchestra, and thrilled his imagination.

The impression was almost painful. It increased his disquiet. He felt that he was not in tune with these mysterious infinitudes.

## PERIWINKLE

There was something radically wrong with him.

He had a sudden desire to flee from these overpowering expanses of sea, sky and shore. It was not only a desire, it was an impulse filling his body as well as his mind, communicating itself to his veins and muscles—an impulse prompting him to flee from nature like a coward from danger.

He had never known this sense of fear before; but then he had never before stood alone with Nature in all her nakedness.

There was something terrible and strange in her aspect. She was so beautiful that her beauty seemed to wither his unworthy heart. There was death in her—death in this revelation of herself.

He could not understand. The situation was unprecedented in his idle, pleasure-seeking, worldly life.

For a moment he did not reason. His mind was full of a medley. He had fleeting memories of his lost youth, his dead ambitions; a painful consciousness of the last few years,

## PERIWINKLE

their futile drift, his carelessly dissipated friends, the bitter shame of it all. And face to face with Nature as she came to him naked through the golden noon, he felt as a man might feel on his wedding day—a man confronted by the ghosts of his dead selves rising up between him and his bride.

These ghosts seemed to mingle with the shapes of the dunes and overrun them, and the veins of black sand like torch-burns seemed to spread and blot out all the strange soft colours.

Perhaps he had over-exerted himself in walking so far; perhaps this was a brief return of the fever; but he believed not. He believed he was beginning to understand.

Turning, he seated himself at the foot of one of the dunes and looked wonderingly over the sea.

It was still very smooth; there was still only that under-movement that slow eternal rhythm of the silver breast.

He believed he was beginning to understand; but the awakening was not pleasant.

## PERIWINKLE

It meant that he, once in tune with golden mornings, once in time with the eternal rhythm, had been so jangled, so wantonly strummed on by flippant players, that every string in him sent forth a discordant note.

How long he sat there staring unblinking at the sea, he did not know. His thoughts obscured the silver water as they had the golden desert. The day was clear but his past befogged it; dull mists of regret crept over the sea.

He gradually grew conscious of a presence near him, and turning, saw the girl who had saved him, sitting quietly beside him at the foot of the dune, looking off, as he had been looking, over the water.

He thought he was dreaming. This was part of the golden phantasmagoria dreamed of at high noon.

She sat a few feet from him, her knees drawn up, her elbows on them, her chin in her hands, her gaze on the sea.

It made no difference that she could have

## PERIWINKLE

easily come unobserved; that her steps in the sand had been silent; that it was just like her to come and seat herself mutely beside him with a quaint unobtrusive companionship. She was not real; she was merely a part of the general illusion.

She had forgotten his presence. She was oblivious of all but the sea.

He had two impressions of her as she sat there—an outer impression and an inner impression. The first was merely of her figure—slight and boyish; of her dress—a plain serge skirt and sailor blouse, navy blue, with a linen collar, low and flaring. It was merely of her profile, this outer impression—her delicately modelled profile and soft tanned skin, and brown hair with gleams and obscure rich colours in it, like living seaweed.

His inner impression he voiced aloud.

“Jove! what a mystery you are crouching here close to the sea—brooding over it! I’ll be shot if I don’t believe you’re the secret spirit of these dunes!”

## XVII

THE girl kept looking seaward without any change of expression.

“How do you feel?” she asked.

“Well enough as far as my body’s concerned,” he answered. “I’m going home to-day.”

“Yes; they told me.”

He, too, looked over the water.

“Did you come here to say good-bye?”

“Yes.”

“I almost wish you hadn’t,” he said.

“Why?”

“I don’t know. It’s like a minor chord stealing into things.”

They both sat silent for a long time, meditating on thoughts that drifted past, vague and suggestive as dim white sails far out on the horizon. At last he said:

## PERIWINKLE

“They tell me that you, too, were cast up on this shore.”

“Yes.”

“Then we’re both castaways. Do you think that’s chance, or something more?”

She did not answer. He turned to her.

“Tell me, you sybil, sitting here so quietly; read this riddle, you little sphinx, you spirit of the dunes: What’s the meaning of this queer moment? Is it chance, or something deeper?”

“Something deeper,” she said.

“You mean —”

“The sea,” she answered simply.

“The sea? Oh, of course—that’s obvious. It cast you up and it cast me up—and here we are. You’re rather too matter-of-fact for a sybil. I didn’t mean that.”

“Neither did I,” she said.

“Didn’t you? Then it’s I who am too matter-of-fact. What did you mean?”

“I don’t know how to explain. Look at the sea and you’ll understand.”

## PERIWINKLE

“What’s the good? I’ve been looking at the sea every day for a week.”

“That’s nothing. I’ve been looking at it every day for years.”

“Jove!—and what have you learned?”

She shook her head.

“I don’t know—at least I don’t think I can put it in words. I can’t talk the way you do. But I know one thing.”

“What?”

“I’d like to go down in it.”

“Down in it! You don’t mean—”

“No; not drowning. If a person could only live deep in it!” She had a dreamy look, quaintly serious. “Which would you rather be—a fish or a bird?”

He smiled, but the smile was fleeting.

“I don’t know. I haven’t thought about that sort of thing for years. Evidently you’d rather be a fish.”

“No; I’m not sure. Look at those gulls.”

He followed her glance out toward the bar

## PERIWINKLE

where a flock of sea-mews flashed in the sun-shine.

“It must be fun,” she said, “to tease the surf like that.” Her eyes sparkled as she noted the dartings, dippings, whirlings of the players in that brilliant game. “Look at them peck at it! Hear them jeer it! See how it tries to catch them!”

He watched the battle of the birds and waters, and the moment had a strange effect on him. Her little verbal sketch, so sudden, true and sprightly, because here was a thing she knew and could express, surprised him, caught him off his guard. All at once he had a glimpse of a childlike happy innocence of spirit such as he had never known before. The glimpse was like the flash of one of the sea-mews over the surf.

“I used to play with the sea like that myself,” she said; “here on the beach with my bare feet.”

At last the oracle had spoken. This was the answer of the spirit of the dunes, the pagan an-

## PERIWINKLE

swer, the Christian answer, the answer of all the ages. “Except ye become as little children—”

Where Nature, large and terrible, had only awed him, this treble note on youth’s Arcadian reed-pipe touched him with exquisite sadness.

He sighed, rose, walked to and fro a moment, then came and stretched himself on the sand, close to her.

She lay back against the sloping dune, her hands clasped behind her head, and he noticed that the slow rise and fall of her young breast had the rhythm of the sea’s breast.

“Tell me,” he said, “more about yourself.”

## XVIII

**H**E felt a new interest in the girl.  
“Was the name of the boat never learned?” he asked.

“No. There were three coasting schooners never heard from after that storm. We calculated that all of them might have been off the Cape that night. Which I was on I don’t know; but there’s a story of a young girl—a lady—who ran off with a sea-captain—and she sailed with him on all his voyages. He was the captain of one of the lost ships. Like as not I was their baby. I love to believe so anyhow. I love to believe it was her arm that held me up out of the sea as she went down for the last time. It’s all like a foggy day with the sun trying to break through,” said Periwinkle; “but the fog won’t let it—no, the fog won’t

## PERIWINKLE

ever let it," she concluded with a gift of true prophecy.

They were both silent till at length he echoed musingly:

"‘And she sailed with him on all his voyages.’"

"Yes."

"Then you're the child of a love match. You're a rare product. ‘And she sailed with him on all his voyages,’" he repeated. "That's epic. That's a line worthy of the Bible. What worlds you're opening to me to-day!—yet you know nothing of life, and I thought I knew everything."

Again he was silent, and again when he spoke he reverted to this hazy story of the sea.

"They might have eloped from any port from Maine to Florida—yes—or for that matter from any port under the blue sky."

Her lips trembled. He saw sudden tears quivering in her blue eyes.

"Yes," said she, "sometimes I forget how

## PERIWINKLE

hopeless it is—sometimes I forget I'm a foundling."

"Foundling!" he ejaculated. "What a word! No; do you know what you are? You're a child of the world—of the sea—of the sky. If you'd lived before Homer you'd have been in the *Odyssey*.—'And she sailed with him on all his voyages.' Lord Harry! I'd forgotten this sort of thing. Poor old Morty wasn't conducive to it. Neither are any of them."

To his surprise she drew one of her hands from behind her head, held it next to his on the sand, compared the two, then replaced it behind her head without a word. He was puzzled and waited for an explanation. Finding that she had none to give, he asked:

"What did you do that for—to show how little yours is, or how big mine is?"

She shook her head.

"I noticed your hand on the blanket one day when you were in bed. I had never noticed a gentleman's hand before. Somehow it

## PERIWINKLE

made me wish I knew more about myself."

Like most men of quick perception he had stupid moments.

"What do you mean?"

"I don't know. Isn't it queer for me to begin to feel badly about a thing after years of not feeling badly about it?"

"Yes," he answered, "but to-day it's that way with me, too. He dug his fingers into the sand. "I don't know what the deuce to do. I'm at a stand-still. I don't know whether to go on down hill, or to try to climb back again." He scooped up a handful of sand and let it run through his fingers. "That's the way the years have gone, and now the question is whether to let the rest of my life run out the same way. Do you realise you don't know my name?"

She nodded.

"The captain says you won't tell him. He doesn't know what to do. He can't make any report."

"Of course he can't. That's just the point.

## PERIWINKLE

I don't want a report. I want time to think. Thinking's about the only luxury I've missed all these years."

"What do you want to think about?"

"I want to think about you."

"Me?"

"Yes—the spirit of the dunes—the answer to the riddle. May I call you Nancy? You're not Scudder any more; not a boy—thank God! Or shall I call you Periwinkle? I like that name."

"Yes; if you'll tell me yours."

"That's a go. I'll tell you my first if you'll call me by it?"

"Yes."

"It's Dick, or Richard if you like—anything but Dickie. They all call me Dickie. And when it gets out that Dickie So-and-so's yacht has been burnt up, it will be the sensation of the season."

"But maybe they're worrying."

"No; I had started on a long cruise. We

## PERIWINKLE

weren't to be heard from for a month—perhaps two or three months."

"But the men who died—how about their folks?"

He did not answer at once, but he was not thinking of the tragedy. She had unconsciously given his thoughts a queer fillip. "Folks." He wished she hadn't used that word. Her occasional little native expressions grated on him—the way she said "maybe," and "like as not," and now this homespun word "folks." True the lapses were rare and slight; her speech was remarkably pure; she had been lucky in being adopted by a one-time schoolmistress. But it seemed a pity that a girl with such a look of breeding should have caught even this faint tinge of the vernacular.

She was looking sadly over the water.

"I can see that yacht afire now," she said.  
"Oh, your poor friend!"

The sympathy in her voice smote him. How the world must have warped him if he could

## PERIWINKLE

shudder at her grammar and even for a moment forgot her spirit! The queer twists of her talk had even crowded out the memory of the friend, who though a stranger to her, she in her loving-kindness mourned. The world had certainly withered him. If he could only stay here a little longer with her and the great expanses and the dunes!

“Why should I let it get out?” he said half to himself. “Poor Morty had no family, and as for the captain and crew, is there any use in hurrying along bad news?”

“No; but you’ll be blamed.”

“I’m accustomed to blame.”

He rose, paced to and fro again, then paused and stood looking at the sea.

Out beyond the bar it was still smooth, still breathing with that same even rhythm as of this girl’s young breast.

Before he withdrew his gaze he began to feel in time with that great heart-beat.

He turned to the sandy reaches and dunes.

The light had changed with the sun; but the

## PERIWINKLE

keynote was still topaz of varying glow or pallor, and the overtones were still those subtle soft violet tinges scarcely nameable, and the dunes were still like golden harp-notes rising out of this symphony.

He found that the sheer beauty of the scene no longer appalled him, no longer even oppressed him.

He turned to her slowly.

“I must go back now to the life-saving station. It’s a long walk and they say it’s a two hours’ drive from there to the train.”

“Yes.” She rose, and he took her two hands.

“It would be a sort of sacrilege,” he said, “to try and thank you. Good-bye, Periwinkle.”

“Good-bye.”

“Won’t you call me by name?”

“Yes; good-bye—Dick.”

He left her and she moved behind the dune, instinctively seeking shelter there as she had often sought it in storms.

## XIX

**S**HE had folded her arms against the soft sand of the dune, and was standing with her face buried in them, when suddenly she heard his voice again.

“Periwinkle, where are you?”

She straightened up, listening, thinking her ears had deceived her.

The call was repeated, and she quivered. She kept to her refuge a moment, recovering herself; then she came out to him on the beach.

“Periwinkle! Periwinkle! I have a plan!” he exclaimed with a new excitement, almost boyish. “I’ve just thought—do you suppose your mother would let me come and board with her for a day or two?”

The girl’s cheeks and temples were suddenly flooded with colour. It streamed up, a ruddy

## PERIWINKLE

tide under her soft brown skin—then as quickly ebbed.

“I don’t know. I think she might.”

“Will you ask her?”

“Yes.”

“Good! I’ll come with you.”

They started southward along the beach and were both silent till they reached the bend where the look of nature began to change. On gaining the top of the long bluff, he paused with an exclamation.

“This is better—more restful.”

The green of the salt meadows was good to look at; so were the long slopes clad in silver moss. There was cheerful warmth in the deep red of a distant cranberry bog at the edge of a wood. He found relief in the quiet greyness of the sand. The dunes were humbler here and devoid of startling shape or colour.

The scene was almost pastoral—a sunny moorland—yet it offered the same seclusion and range.

## PERIWINKLE

“I do hope your mother will put me up,” he said. “If this whole business is something more than chance, if the sea casts a man away to find himself, he’d better have a try.”

“You’ll have to tell mother who you are.”

“I’ll give her my middle name—Langdon.”

“Then are you going to bury yourself here? That’s what summer people call it.”

“Do summer people come here?”

“They drive out now and then and they say, ‘think of being buried in this wilderness!’ ”

“No thought could please me more,” he declared.

“Then do you mean to say you don’t even intend to write to anybody?”

“No—except perhaps to—there’s one—”

They walked along the bluff in silence. At last she asked, looking straight before her:

“Is it a woman?”

“Yes.”

“Your mother?”

“No.”

“Your sister?”

## PERIWINKLE

She knew intuitively that he shook his head.  
They walked on without looking at each  
other. Finally she asked:

“Are you bound to her in any way?”

He hesitated a moment that seemed to her  
an hour, then he answered:

“Yes.”

## XX

**A**NN SCUDDER was a woman of few intuitions, but the sight of her daughter and the stranger descending from the sand-ridge put her on her guard.

She stood back from the window to see without being seen, and sharply studied the approaching pair—Nancy's look, the man's look and their mutual demeanour. She surmised at once that this was the castaway rescued by Nancy. He was not one of the surfmen. The native flannels he wore did not deceive her, even at a distance. His walk and bearing were easier than those of a surfman. He had an idle swing unlike the staunch and dogged step of men accustomed to patrol this stormy shore.

Ann remembered Nancy's reticence in bed that morning after the rescue; she thought of the girl's frequent visits to the station, and

## PERIWINKLE

while she peered out at this young stranger approaching with Nancy across the sands, her eyes, under her down-drawn brows, were keen as those of a mother-hawk.

The old beachcomber sat outside, basking in the sunshine. His failing eyes were closed against the glare and he leaned with clasped hands on a cane between his legs—the stick chosen for to-day from his curious assortment. He was so bent and rickety-looking that but for this support he had surely toppled forward into the sand. Even in his heyday he had had a marked bend, thanks to his constant stooping over the beach, his long trudges homeward, staggering under mountains of wreckage; and now his years weighed on him so heavily that he feared that each new day added to the load would prove to be the last straw. And then he would go deeper into the sand than he had ever yet gone.

But sometimes he had happier fancies here in the sunlight with his eyes closed; sometimes he had day-dreams in which the weight of his

## PERIWINKLE

years seemed more desirable burdens. Once again he was bearing home gifts from the sea, mysterious prizes to be investigated, pondered on and added to his beloved collection.

“Grandfather.” It was Periwinkle’s voice.

He stirred but did not open his eyes.

“D’ye remember,” he mumbled, “the night the *Comanche*—that excursion boat—turned turtle outside Crooked Bar? No, that was afore your time. I can see the beach next morning.” He raised his head a little and his closed eyes had the occult visionary look of a blind man’s eyes. He was keeping them shut to hold the day-dream. “Two hundred passengers aboard her—and next morning all their stuff spread out like what not on a bargain counter. My! how we snatched for it! But I had the start on the village gang. I count that the best haul Eph Rawlins ever made. Lan’ sakes!” he concluded, his voice suddenly rising with shrill delight as the vision reached its climax; “I can feel the pack on my back same’s then!”

## PERIWINKLE

He opened his eyes with a senile smile at his granddaughter; then as he saw the man at her side, his eyes narrowed with the old peering look and he grunted, irritated at thought of how he had unwittingly revealed himself to a stranger.

“Grandfather, this is the man whose yacht was burned.” She hastened within to her mother.

The veteran beachcomber nodded, not in greeting, but to imply that he had already surmised the stranger’s identity.

“Anything else come ashore?”

“No,” said the visitor; “I’m the only bit of wreckage that was picked up.”

Again the knowing nod.

“That’s the worst of fire. When fire eats up a ship a man may as well stay abed. The beach’ll be bare as a bone—though sometimes there’s lumps of charcoal.”

Dick smiled ironically.

“This time the beach was not bare as a bone, you see.”

## PERIWINKLE

The old man slightly shrugged his stooping shoulders.

"I ain't much on life-saving," he muttered, drily.

"Your granddaughter is."

"That's so. You ought to know."

"I do. She is really wonderful."

The old man's face softened and brightened. Out came one of his hands from the stick under his straggling white beard—a hand like a claw.

"Shake," he said. "She's the likeliest gift the sea ever gave us."

The two men, in age and nature so far apart, warmly shook hands as if recognising the existence of a bond between them.

At this moment Nancy reappeared followed by Ann. Surprised by the old man's unaccustomed geniality, the girl and woman were speechless a moment, Nancy's face brightening at the sight, her mother's darkening.

As the hands of the two men parted, Nancy found voice.

"Mother, this is the man the sea cast up."

## PERIWINKLE

He smiled and bowed.

“Mrs. Scudder, I believe.”

She slightly inclined her head.

“My name,” said he, “is Richard Langdon.

I’ve come to ask if you can let me board with you a little while. I have urgent reasons for wanting to prolong my stay on this shore and my time’s up at the life-saving station.”

Ann turned to her daughter.

“Nance, you haven’t had your dinner yet. I left it in the oven for you.”

The girl, obeying the tacit command, re-entered the house.

“Come one side a minute,” said Ann to the visitor, and led the way around a corner of the house beyond earshot of her father.

The old man muttered irascibly at being excluded from the interview. He couldn’t make out what had come over Ann in the last few days, but he kept muttering to himself that he’d get even with her for being so grumpy. It made little difference that she had sacrificed her life to him, stuck to him through all his

## PERIWINKLE

years of crazy beachcombing in this wilderness. He was concerned only with her present gloom and crankiness which reminded him of her bitter ways before the sea had given Nancy to her.

What was she talking about to the visitor? He could hear her speaking harshly, but though he strained his ears, her words were unintelligible to him.

He felt vindictive against her; he'd like to pay her back for her sulks and her secrecy. He was keen enough to realise that she did not take kindly to this visitor, and he had an inkling of the reason why. It occurred to him that anything he could do to show that he liked the stranger would rile her, and the desire to rile her was in his shrivelled heart.

He rose unsteadily, hobbled to the barn, and began delving amid his hidden treasures.

Meanwhile Ann was having her say without circumlocution.

“What’s your urgent reason, Mr. Langdon, for wanting to stay here?”

## PERIWINKLE

“That would be hard to explain, Mrs. Scudder.”

“It ain’t my girl, is it?”

“You mean Periwinkle?” he asked, dazed by the woman’s frankness.

“Yes. Who else? So you call her Periwinkle already.” Then seeing that he hesitated, “Well—I asked you a straight question, Mr. Langdon.”

He was quite abashed. He was unaccustomed to women who handled situations without gloves. At length he replied:

“I’ll give you a straight answer. I don’t know why I want to stay.”

“Do you call that a straight answer? I don’t call it any kind of answer. Now look here. Many a man’s been prowling around after Nance; they’ve come from every village on the Cape—yes, and a lot further. She’s got something about her that just draws them, but they might as well stay home. She always sends them off quick enough, and if she didn’t, I would. The Cape’s a bad place for a young

## PERIWINKLE

girl. The men are as loose as the sand. But I guess you come of a pretty loose class, too, don't you?"

He laughed mirthlessly.

"Yes, I do. That's why I want to stay here."

"Is it? Well that's why I don't want you to stay here."

"But Mrs. Scudder, you don't understand. Your love for Periwinkle prejudices you. It's only that I want to get away from the loose class you speak of. Good Lord! She and I have known each other only a few days. Your fears are utterly groundless I assure you —besides—"

She interrupted him impatiently.

"Wait a minute. Have you a wife?"

"No."

"Well—you're a man, aren't you? Are you a man?"

"Yes, Mrs. Scudder, and a gentleman."

"That's neither here nor there. If anything, that makes it worse. What I'm getting

## PERIWINKLE

at is this: You're a man and she's a girl, and she saved your life—and there's something about her to a man, in spite of herself, that's like honey to a bee."

He nodded.

"Yes; she was born of a love match."

Mrs. Scudder winced. Her face was grey as the sand they stood on.

"Oh, so Nance has told you all about herself, has she? What's come over the girl?"

He made a deprecatory gesture.

"It was very natural. You see your daughter and I are both castaways."

"Yes," said Ann, "I see. I'm afraid we have no room here for you, Mr. Langdon."

The shrill voice of the beachcomber intervened. He came hobbling around the corner of the house.

"Yes, we have, Ann; yes, we have!" he cried vehemently. "Nance can sleep with you."

"What!—and give him her room? Never!"

"Yes, give him her room, I say."

"No, father."

## PERIWINKLE

The old man trembled with a rage which to Langdon seemed partly assumed to master her. He raised his stick and shook it at her.

“Don’t you cross me, Ann,” he warned her. “I’m gettin’ tired of your crankiness. I won’t put up with it, no, I won’t.” He pointed with his stick to an upper window. “Go get the room ready.”

She did not protest again. When her father feigned temper, he strangely dominated her. It was these crafty studied outbursts of wrath that had kept the strong woman his slave for years, even while they had deadened her affection for him.

She turned submissively toward the door. She looked callous and resigned, with the old bleak resignation of the days when she had been childless.

Langdon could not but pity her.

“Mrs. Scudder,” he said, starting after her hastily; “I had no idea how it was. I meant to stay only for a day or two. Put me anywhere. Put me in the garret or even in the

## PERIWINKLE

barn. This is too bad my being forced on you. I'd lie out here in the sand rather than—”

She shook her head.

“No; if it's got to be—”

“But it has not got to be.”

She smiled and he thought it was the saddest, strangest smile he had ever seen.

“You don't know,” she said, “but I knew long ago. I knew this day would come.”

She went inside to prepare the room.

The old beachcomber chuckled, and taking Langdon's arm, led him back around the corner of the house.

“I brought you one of my sticks,” he said. “I wanted to give you a present just to rile her.”

Leaning heavily on his own stick, he stooped and fumbled for another which he had left on his chair. Picking it up, he eyed it fondly. It was indeed good to look upon. It was slender, straight and tapering, but strong. It was without any adornment whatever, but the

## PERIWINKLE

old man had smoothed it by rubbing it for hours in the sand.

“True Norway pine, home grown,” he declared. “I cut it from one of the gaff’s of the schooner *Hilma*, wracked off Crooked Bar twenty year’ ago next September.” As the other hung back, loth to take it, he chuckled again and held it out. “Here; don’t be a fool. I was only jokin’ about rilin’ her. This is a token between you and me.”

The younger man took the stick with murmured thanks, and his host, now satisfied, sat down again in the sunshine.

Then Periwinkle appeared in the doorway. “You’d better come in and have some dinner,” she said to Langdon. “I hope you don’t mind eating in the kitchen.”

“I should think not! Have you had yours?”

“Not yet.”

“Good!” he exclaimed, and they went in.

They sat at a plain deal table near a window through which the sunlight slanted broad-

## PERIWINKLE

cast into the kitchen; and though the china was thick and the meal frugal and salty, he enjoyed that dinner as he had rarely enjoyed any dinner before.

They had bacon cut in long strips from a rasher and cooked just crisp enough; they had eggs fresh laid by Ann's own hens and neatly fried so that the yolks lay like small golden suns set in snowy circles; they had piping hot coffee, half chicory no doubt, but so well brewed that it gave off an aroma redolent of flavour; and they had brown-bread, moist and sweet.

"Is this your cooking?" he asked. "I never had such an appetite in my life."

"No," she said. "I'm afraid I'll never learn how. Mother just cooked it fresh for us. There was some in the oven, but she said she guessed that wouldn't do."

"Your mother cooked my dinner?"

"Yes; and she's upstairs preparing my room for you."

## PERIWINKLE

"She's wonderful!" he said. "She makes me think of a sort of female King Lear. Have you read 'King Lear'?"

"No," she replied. "I've read very little. I've read Mrs. Hemans and 'A Garland of Beautiful Thoughts,' and 'Gems from the New England Poets.' That's about all mother has except a few old school-books and the Bible."

He did not smile. He would have cut off his hand sooner than let her think he was laughing at her.

He glanced about the kitchen. How clean it was! how spick and span! Everything was neat and shining and in its place. Behind the stove hung a line of cooking utensils under a shelf spread with a long sheet of white paper, scolloped at the edges. On the shelf stood a round nickel clock flanked on each side by a pewter candlestick.

There were shelves, too, in a corner, each covered with that inevitable sheet of white paper, scolloped at the edges. Two or three

## PERIWINKLE

cups, saucers, plates and platters, all thick white crockery, were arranged there with scrupulous precision. In another corner stood a wood-box and on the wall over it hung a small cheap mirror that had lost its frame. It was dim with age and seemed to be the only thing in the room that was unused.

Facing the stove at one side, there was a wooden rush-bottomed chair with wide arms. On the other side of the stove, stood another chair, straight-backed, wooden-seated and devoid of arms.

“That’s where they sit,” said Periwinkle, “every evening when I’m in bed or out on the beach.”

“Do you go out alone at night?”

“Of course I do.”

“You wouldn’t if I had anything to say about it.”

She laughed, and he realised that it was the first time he had heard that laughter. It was like a little golden chime tuned to the sun-shine.

## PERIWINKLE

"If I wasn't accustomed to going out at night," she said, "where would you be?"

In the meantime her mother had finished her arrangements upstairs. Coming down, she avoided the pair in the kitchen, went out by the rear door, and came around the house to her father. He blinked up at her.

"Did you fix the room for him?"

"Yes."

"Ann, you were a fool to think of turning him away. His board money'll come in mighty handy."

"Yes," she admitted. "But hear them laughing and talking in there."

"Why shouldn't they laugh and talk?"

Ann stared off at the sea.

"I'd never have thought," she said half to herself, "there'd come a time when I'd wince at the sound of that baby laughter of hers."

## XXI

**I**N the evening Dick Langdon went out on the bluff to speak with the patrolman from the station. It was the giant form of Jim Curran that loomed up out of the darkness. The two men met near the half-way house and stood talking a moment in the open night under the stars.

“I missed my train.”

“Yes; we knew you would.”

“I’m staying at Mrs. Scudder’s.”

“Yes; we figgered out you’d try and work that.”

“Tell Captain Sears I’ll be over to see him in the morning.”

“All right—don’t hurry yourself;” and Jim, turning up his lantern, entered the half-way house to leave his token for the patrol from the next station. When he came out he asked, “How long are you going to stay?”

## PERIWINKLE

“I don’t know,” said Dick. “Just over night, very likely.”

“Do you mean that?”

“Of course I mean it.”

“H’m! Where are they stowin’ you away?”

“Periwinkle’s going to sleep with her mother. They’re giving me her room.”

It was as if a tremor passed through the giant body. To the men at the station that little bedchamber, which none of them had ever entered, seemed sacred as a shrine. The light she kept burning for them in that upper window had been for years the patrolman’s guiding star.

Jim turned without speaking and began the homeward march, his head bowed as if against a gale, though no wind blew.

Dick, returning to the house, met Periwinkle in the doorway. He said to her:

“What do you suppose is the matter with big Jim? I never saw a man so gloomy.”

## PERIWINKLE

Her brow took on a troubled look.

“Where is he?”

“He’s just started back from the half-way house.”

She hastened out past Dick.

“I must go and cheer him up.”

“Shall I come too?”

“No.”

“I think I’d better,” he called after her.

She looked back at him over her shoulder, smiled and shook her head.

“You ought to put on your hat and coat,” he called; but she saw Jim’s lantern now, and there was no detaining her. She went off swiftly along the beach.

A moment later, Jim felt her little hand slip through his arm. He did not stop; he went on walking a moment without looking at her, then very cautiously, he glanced down sideways from his great height to see if by any chance it was not a dream.

She laughed that little merciful laugh of hers that was like golden light poured into

## PERIWINKLE

others, seeking out all the dark crevices of their discontent.

“Jim, you great foolish!” she said, slipping around in front of him to look up into his face. “Did you think I was a ghost?”

He stopped and heaved a deep sigh.

“The touch of your hands felt too durned good to be true,” he replied simply. “How long is it since we’ve patrolled the beach together?”

“Not long, Jim.”

“Seems years,” he told her. His glance, bashful as a boy’s, fell before hers. “Seems a lifetime.”

Her heart went out to her beloved giant, he was so downcast; but something warned her to restrain her sympathy. For the first time she felt shy with him and reserved. She averted her eyes toward the dark water. There was an awkward silence, she wistful and wondering at the change, he staring down gloomily at the sand.

The night was clear and cold. The stars

## PERIWINKLE

shone forth with a wintry brilliance. The sea lay calm, and here and there far off where the starbeams faintly touched it, there were spots of emerald lustre like the eyes of fabled sea-creatures peering ashore. The ripples along the beach caught the starshine, too, and their froth broke lightly into diamond dust.

The sandy slopes and hollows with their carpet of pallid moss were flecked with an unearthly greenish hue. They were like the billows of another sea.

At length Jim raised his eyes and looked at Periwinkle, and summoning up his courage, said with slow and simple directness:

“The time’s come to speak out. We’ve all been feeling mighty bad the past few days. You’re not going to give us boys at the station the go-by, are you? We’d always hoped you’d choose one of us for your husband. I’m not laying particular stress on myself. That don’t seem fair to the others. But if you could ever”—his voice fell lower, hushed with feeling—“if you and me—”

## PERIWINKLE

She checked him as gently as she could.

“Oh, Jim!” she broke in, looking up at him and shaking her head in tender reproach; “don’t say anything more. Let’s forget you’ve said as much as you have. I’ve always felt like such a boy with you all—a sort of younger brother of the whole crew.” Her hand stole affectionately to his shoulder. “Please don’t spoil it—don’t make love to me, Jim!”

He saw that her eyes were moist in the lantern-light, and his heart smote him. He spoke to her much as he had spoken that first morning in her babyhood.

“There—there!” he said sympathetically. “Don’t feel so bad about it. I’m sorry I let myself go.”

She took his hand and gave it a grateful little squeeze.

“Good-night, Jim. Try and forget. Don’t dwell on it. If we dwell on things we get moping and aren’t any use to anyone.” She drew away, turned again to the dark sea. “I know what I’m talking about, Jim. There’s

## PERIWINKLE

something which, if I really thought about it for one minute, would make me so down-hearted I don't know what I'd do."

He forgot his own trouble at once.

"What is it, Periwinkle? What is it?" he asked solicitously.

She shook her head. She had generously mentioned it to divert his mind, knowing that misery loves company.

"Good-night, Jim," she repeated. Turning, that he might not see her tears fall, she drifted back toward the lights of her home.

She slept with her mother that night to make room for Langdon.

He entered her little bedchamber with a feeling of tenderness, a feeling of awe which he had not experienced since his earliest youth.

The white walls and muslin curtains, the small white bureau and washstand, the clean matting and the little snowy cot, all spoke to him of a peace, innocence and simplicity beyond his ken since childhood.

## PERIWINKLE

On a table near the cot he found a diminutive New Testament much worn, and he wondered at it—Periwinkle seemed to be such a little pagan, so utterly beyond the snares of dogma. But then he understood. He realised how she must love the story of the simple Galilean fishermen and their Captain.

He lay awake for hours in the little cot, thinking of her.

## XXII

THE next night Dick, who strolled alone to the beach, met Sam Coffin at the half-way house. Sam said to him:

“You didn’t come over to the station to-day. What kept you? You told Jim you’d likely be goin’ home this morning.”

“Yes; but I wanted to see the old man’s curios.”

“H’m, we thought you’d find some good excuse.”

Dick coolly ignored this.

“What a contrast,” he said, “that little flower blossoming in the midst of all that decaying wreckage!”

Sam eyed him uneasily.

“You refer to Periwinkle, sir?”

“Yes. It isn’t only those funny little beach-things that are called periwinkles; there’s a flower called a periwinkle, too.”

## PERIWINKLE

"Is there, sir? Then her name fits her in more ways than one. She's more than ever a child to be cherished, so to speak, and allowed to blossom without blight or blemish from the hand of man. Ain't that so, sir?" Sam asked with meaning.

"That's so," said Dick, his eyes wavering before the other's unhappy gaze.

Sam looked to his lantern, and entering the half-way house, left his token. On emerging he paused a moment to glance off at the lighted window of that little upper room which was Periwinkle's, and his sad ardent face, lit vaguely by his lantern, suggested to Dick some face he had once seen abroad in a quaint old painting of the Adoration of the Virgin.

"That light's been a great help," said Sam, "a great comfort."

Then suddenly he remembered the news Jim had brought back to the station the night before, the news that this man Langdon had entered that upper chamber and was living there. Sam looked like a man stricken with

## PERIWINKLE

disillusion. The glow in his face turned to ashes. Without another word, without another glance at Dick, he faced about in the direction of the station and trudged off wearily along the dark beach.

Later that evening Dick said to Periwinkle: "Sam's love for you is more impersonal than Jim's. He has the heart of a poet. He worships you from afar—as Dante worshipped Beatrice."

"Tell me," she said, "about Dante and Beatrice;" and he did so walking with her under the stars.

## XXIII

**D**ICK was deeply interested in this grim old regiment of which Periwinkle was the daughter. On the third night he strolled out again to the half-way house, and this time he met Ira on patrol duty. Ira's greeting was curt, dry.

“Hullo! I thought you were goin' home to-day?”

“So I was, but I wanted to see the buried forest.”

“Yes, we noticed you from the lookout. We saw you meandering around with her.”

Ira entered the half-way house and hung up his token. He was not as forbearing as Jim and Sam. When he came out again he held up his lantern so that its gleam fell full on the other's face, and he said sharply:

“Look here—that little flower you spoke

## PERIWINKLE

about to Sam Coffin ain't to be picked for a night's pleasure. If any man did that, by God, we'd drown him in the sea!"

Ira was not slow like big Jim, not vague like queer Sam. He was aggressive and crotchety and sometimes as rash as in his youth. Frequently his hot temper led him to such extremes as could only be followed by periods of bitter repentance.

He was in the grip of that temper now. Flinging past Langdon, he made off headlong for the beachcomber's cottage. Dick, bewildered by his sudden warning, roamed off further along the beach to face new issues of life that seemed to be rising around him on this shore, vague and obscure as a mist out of the sea.

Ira's sharp rap on the cottage door was answered by Periwinkle herself.

"Come out a minute," he besought her feverishly. "I've got to have a word with you alone, Periwinkle."

Bewildered she stepped down from the

## PERIWINKLE

threshold and closed the door behind her.

“What’s the matter, Ira?”

“Everything’s the matter. Look here, Periwinkle; if that man Langdon stays hoverin’ round you much longer, there’s goin’ to be trouble. If any man has a right to you, it’s me. Who was it took you from the hand of your drowning mother? Who is it would cut out his heart for you? Answer that!”

They stood in the dense shadows of the house. The air was not so clear to-night; the stars were dim, and the sound of the surf had a note of muffled thunder in it. The sea was inky, the sand black as coal-dust save just here where Ira’s lantern and the windows of the house lit it up in yellow patches.

Periwinkle was silent as death at first. Then she took the lantern from his hand and raised it so that its light fell across his distorted face.

“Ira, can this be really you?”

As she held it up, the light was on her face, too, and he read his answer unmistakably.

## PERIWINKLE

She could not help thinking how different he was from Jim and Sam. Jim had not said a word against Dick, nor a word about the rescue that gave them a claim on her, though he had had a hand in it himself. Nor yet had he advanced his own suit, to the detriment of his comrades. As for Sam he had not made love to her at all, and never would, yet in a way he loved her more deeply than did any of the other surfmen.

But she had seen Ira risk his life in the sea a hundred times to rescue the drowning, and she knew that after this selfish outburst he would hate himself at thought of it.

“Is this really you, Ira?”

Under the light from her upraised lantern he hung his head and prodded the sand with the toe of his rubber boot.

“Ira, how could you? You know I’d do anything in the world for you but this. Don’t think I’m ungrateful. You’d none of you want me to marry you to pay you for saving me from the sea. I love you all, but I can’t,

## PERIWINKLE

can't love you that way. I've always felt like a boy with everyone of you—the younger brother of the whole crew. Don't spoil it by making love to me."

She rested her hand on his shoulder as she had rested it on Jim's. She had said she loved them all. It was because she knew their hearts.

"Ira, I believe you're sorry already that you've spoken to me like this."

His face was dogged.

"No, I ain't," he said like a sullen boy.

Her hand slipped under his arm.

"Will you let me patrol the beach with you a little way?"

He looked up at her eagerly, his face brightening, softening.

"Would you do it, Periwinkle? After the things I've just said to you?"

"Of course I would. You didn't mean them."

"No; but I don't deserve to have you patrol with me. Go back in the house, Nance. You'll take cold out here. What I need is to

## PERIWINKLE

have it out with myself all alone. If ever there was an angel walking this earth, you're her, and if ever there was a devil walking it, I'm him. Good-night," he said brusquely, and turned on his heel without another word.

She looked after him with a wistful little smile; then, sighing, she went back into the house.

When Dick came in he said to her:

"Your friend Ira's a dangerous customer, I believe."

Her answer surprised him.

"Maybe he is, but anyhow he's the noblest of them all. He puts me in mind of St. Peter."

## XXIV

RICHARD LANGDON stayed there several weeks before he wrote to the friends of his old life and even when at last, under the spur of conscience, he sent news of himself, he jealously guarded the mystery of his present whereabouts. He walked seven miles to one of the more distant villages, found a man taking train for Boston, and entrusted to his keeping a letter to be posted in that city. The letter said:

*“Dear Isabel:*

“My cruise, begun in madness, has ended in tragedy. One night the yacht caught fire, her boilers exploded, and we were cast up as if out of a volcano into the sea.

“I’ll spare you the awful details. They’re branded on my mind forever—little Morty’s terrified look as he sank. Yes; poor old Morty’s dead and all the crew. I’m the only

## PERIWINKLE

survivor. This is the crowning irony of it, that I, who cared least about life, should have had it forced on me all over again.

“There was Morty, a moment before it happened, calling for champagne. He wanted it because he was sick, but he said he wanted it to drink to human happiness. Wasn’t that like him? And there was I saying he must be drunk even to dream that human happiness existed.

“He looked at me with that forlorn droop of his eyes and mouth—you know—a kind of silent drawl, cynical beyond words.

“Dickie, don’t say it doesn’t exist,’ he pleaded plaintively. Then he looked so miserable that he had to confess how he was feeling. ‘Oh, to think of ordering that wonderful wine of yours as a mere medicine for sea-sickness!’

“Those were almost his last words. Just after the fire broke out, he said:

“‘I wouldn’t have minded so much if Henry had brought the champagne.’

## PERIWINKLE

“Poor Morty! The very last thing he said was almost inaudible, the racket of the explosion was so terrific, but I heard him cry:

“‘God, Dickie, I’m in pieces!’

“Isabel, I didn’t mean to tell you this. I didn’t mean to profane his memory. But you knew him, and I knew him, and between all of us there were few illusions left. That’s the point. It isn’t Morty; it’s merely all that he stood for—the poor little worldly devil—in my life.

“Can I make you understand—you who are still in that world? Can I count on your forgiveness if I withhold my address from you? I am sending this letter to be mailed in Boston so the post-mark won’t betray me.

“Let me beg you to consider me dead to you and all our crowd for at least some time. Isabel, look upon it all as if I had gone down with Morty. I ask this because I think in a way I really did die that night—the old husk of me. At least I hope so.

“My present life is utterly new. I think

## PERIWINKLE

I'm being born again, though there are temptations even in this lonely simple place—temptations stronger than any of those in the old days—and the sin would be a thousand times blacker.

“Do, if you can, keep the news of the wreck out of the papers. Morty has no family, so there's no duty to be done by him. He left no money, poor fellow—only debts. As for the crew, I'm doing what I can for their families, indirectly, through certain bankers.

“Speaking of bankers and money brings to my mind, Isabel, an old misgiving. Let me put it plainly—I'm trying to learn to speak out nowadays.

“It has seemed to me that my fortune—I mean that you—no, I can't speak out. I'm afraid I haven't learned how, after all. And yet why not? Think how I've written about Morty and myself. And we were a trio, you and Morty and I—too much of a trio, dare I say? Why is it that because you're a woman I should spare you? Isabel—you must have

## PERIWINKLE

known why I started on that crazy cruise in the dead of winter—and Morty, too. Here's the truth as man to man, the modern rude truth which one of your sex in these equal days should bear. Here's the truth—Morty set out because you had thrown him over for me; and I set out because I wasn't sure of myself. I won't say I wasn't sure of *you*. I can't bring myself to put it all in words. The old fashioned way is best. You're a woman, and womanhood is sanctuary. Our world at least teaches little charities—the kindness of glossing things over—the courtesy of beating about the bush.

“But I must convey my doubts to you.

“In the first place I am absolutely certain that you cared for Morty—cared for him as a sort of toy, or curious kind of pet, who never bored you. That was as near as you could come to loving any man. But you loved money more. And I with my fortune—worse luck to it!—personified luxury to you. So you threw him over for me.

## PERIWINKLE

“I know beyond a shadow of question that you don’t love me. If I thought there was a possibility of your even missing me I’d come back to you at once. But it isn’t in you ever to miss anyone—except perhaps Morty.

“Nevertheless I know you’ll hold me to our engagement, as you have every right to do. If you were here you would frankly say as much in so many words. You’re almost inhumanly honest. That’s part of your power.

“The other part lies in your utter coldness. Yes, Isabel, you’re cold as death. That was what fascinated me. I wanted somehow to melt you, to compel you to know the meaning of human feeling—a woman’s passion. I wanted to destroy your balance, upset your cool calculations, throw you into mental and spiritual confusion.

“I believe this is one of the subtlest, most dangerous fascinations—but of course it isn’t love. It’s a desperate game while it lasts—part of man’s eternal search for the thing he knows he can’t find—this diving down to

## PERIWINKLE

grasp the heart of a woman who has no heart.

“But can the game last long? What if the player wakes to the follies of it all? What if he longs for sturdy manhood—to be clean, simple, real, living his life true? Then, if he has the chance which I have now on this secluded shore—the chance to stand on solid ground after a dark life of shipwreck, and feel a new dawn rise out of the east and flow around him full of promise—can the man be blamed if he tries to make of it a reincarnation?

“And yet, Isabel, I sign myself in honour,  
“Yours,  
“DICK.”

The letter, heartfelt though it was, caused him no uneasiness as to results. There could be no results, no reply, he had so carefully guarded his privacy.

He knew little of the close interweaving of gossip along the Cape.

Ann Scudder walked all the way to the vil-

## PERIWINKLE

lage three times in a week. The third time she had her reward. She unravelled the close weave, and picking up the thread she wanted, learned the name and address on Langdon's letter.

For weeks thereafter, watching his conduct with her one ewe lamb, she held the secret, a ready weapon, hidden in her breast.

## XXV

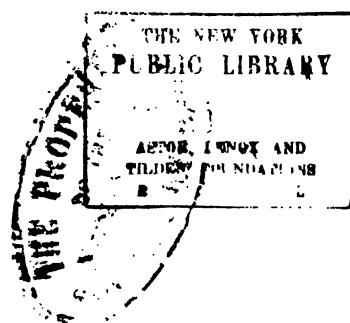
**S**PRING and summer came, and Richard Langdon was still there, steeped in the enchantment.

From Boston he had procured a small sketch-easel and other paraphernalia of the out-door artist, and was trying to regain a talent thrown aside in early youth after a single year of study in Paris. To put these scenes on canvas, to catch their ever-changing tones, the elusive flush and radiance of the shapely dunes, the rise of the breakers, those white-headed grenadiers, advancing; and best of all, the girl, the daughter of that terrible sea-regiment—little Periwinkle, always vivid in the foreground, yet elusive, too—what an inspiration it was to him!

It was as though, could he but put these scenes and people definitely on canvas, it



“The elusive flush and radiance of the dunes, the rise of the breakers.”



## PERIWINKLE

would in a way insure the permanence of his new vision of life.

He and Periwinkle were always together. Sometimes when the old beachcomber sat nodding outside his door in the summer sunshine, Dick would sketch him, Periwinkle watching the attempts, fascinated, the two conversing in undertones, not to disturb the sleeper.

Again, as a detail in the landscape, he would try to sketch the tumbledown shed. How frowsy it looked with the salt hay straggling out of its gaping seams, and yet what a touch of quaint rusticity it lent to the barren expanses!

He tried, too, to make a sketch of the rickety barn with its coating of silver-green moss, and purple lichens, and the ship's name-board over the door.

Periwinkle stood for him in that crazy doorway, her slim fair figure flanked by wreckage and against a background of inner gloom. What a contrast! But above the eaves she had long ago built crude little bird-houses, and

## PERIWINKLE

now as he painted her, the swallows were darting in and out above her head, and he suggested one or two in the picture, so that for all the contrast, there was a touch of sprightly harmony between Periwinkle and the sea-ruins.

The ship's name over the door was:

*Valkyrie.*

He talked to her of Norse legends, the old sea-kings; he told her of the opera and its story, and of other operas and other stories, opening up to her vistas into undreamed-of worlds.

Thus, here and there out of the wreckage from foreign shores, sprang, as it were, the seeds of a new life for the little sea-foundling.

He tried once to paint an interior, a corner of the small museum they called the parlour. On a corner shelf stood an old ship's figure-head, an image of the Virgin, with a cracked halo and splintered face; yet there was a faded beauty in the image and in many of the con-

## PERIWINKLE

glomerate knick-knacks cluttering the shelves beneath it like votive offerings.

He found wonderful old curios from wrecked ships—antique brasses, a battered compass of fine levantine craftsmanship, an old-fashioned sextant inscribed with the name of its Venetian maker, a broken navy bugle engraved in Spanish, a moth-eaten cocked hat, a pair of tarnished epaulets. What a medley! What a mixed and cosmopolitan array! Only the ocean could have yielded up such treasures. In age and variety they suggested more than one generation of sea-harvesters.

Dick could not paint this interior; its details were too numerous and confused; but into each relic he read a story for Periwinkle. He talked of the Virgin and of Italy, of this religion and that religion; and the levantine compass suggested old tales of the Corsairs; and the Venetian sextant led them to the stars, many of which he named for her at night; and the Spanish bugle, cocked hat and tarnished epaulets conjured up the great

## PERIWINKLE

Armada and legends of naval heroes—  
Raleigh, Drake, Nelson, Paul Jones.

In five months the girl had a wide smattering of education, yet it had come idly and at random, glowing with the daily joy of their companionship.

Dick wanted to paint Ann Scudder on a grey day, standing solitary against a leaden sea; but in her philosophy art was a vain thing; moreover, she looked upon this painting of his as a mere pretext to prolong his stay, his tubes and brushes the devil's weapons, and she doggedly refused him.

Meanwhile, lying stark awake night after night with Periwinkle sleeping beside her, Ann laboriously composed a letter to the woman in Boston and learned it by heart that if the need arose she might write at once. But in spite of her jealousy, Ann's vigilance and mother instinct assured her that this little Periwinkle, lying so close to her, was Periwinkle still. And with this supreme consolation, she would fall asleep in the grey dawn.

## XXVI

**I**T was an August evening, the air heavy and warm, the moon full, the silver sea calm as death.

“What a night,” said Dick, “for a walk to the buried forest! Let’s go.”

Periwinkle went to her mother, who was seated in her straight-backed chair near the stove. It was a warm night, but the stove was glowing with a fire. The aged beachcomber always felt cold nowadays and when the sun had set he dragged his old bones to the corner beside the stove. Ann, too, seemed to need the stove’s warmth. She was lean now, as in her early years, and looked bloodless.

Periwinkle bent over her.

“Mother, we’re going for a walk.”

This unfortunately was one of those moments when Ann felt the presence of the

## PERIWINKLE

natural barrier between her and her foster-daughter. Nancy was more than ever aloof from her, independent by right of birth. Moreover, there was a soft place in Ann's character. In the past, she had not found it hard to protect Nancy from her suitors, because Nancy had not cared in her heart. But this was different. Nancy did care in her heart, and Ann was as indulgent as the weakest of mothers.

"All right," she consented, lifelessly; "I won't say no."

"Thanks, mother."

"Take a lantern, Nance."

"No, there's a moon."

"All right. Be back in good time."

"Yes, mother, we will."

As they left the house the aged beach-comber chuckled.

"What are you laughing at?" demanded Ann.

"You!" he told her derisively, and dozed off again.

## PERIWINKLE

Dick and Periwinkle set forth along the shore like birds set free of a cage. Their comradeship of months seemed suddenly to be hastening to completion. Each felt—he more consciously than she—that they fast approached, as it were, some verge, something good or bad impending.

They said little, but their long silences were tense with unspoken feelings. Hitherto when they had walked together silently, they had said nothing because they understood each other; to-night they did not dare to understand each other, and when they did speak, their few words had a muffled ring and reverberance like sunken bells.

“Here comes the patrol! Who is it to-night?”

Periwinkle watched the figure of the solitary surfman as he approached them along the beach.

“It’s Sam. I’m glad it’s not Jim or Ira.”

“Why?”

## PERIWINKLE

"It would make them so angry to find us way out here together at this hour."

Sam Coffin met them and stopped with a murmured greeting. He looked like a frail and grizzled ghost in the moonlight.

"Fine night," said Dick.

"Yes, but it won't be later. Over by the station, fog's crawlin' in from the east'erd." He turned to the girl. "Where you goin', Periwinkle?"

"Just for a walk."

Sam cast a wistful glance about him over the sea and up and down the beach and across the dunes and endless sandy spaces in the moonshine.

Dick had never seen a lonelier figure.

"D'you know," said Sam, "they come here nights like this—lots of 'em."

Periwinkle nodded. She understood.

"He means the souls of the drowned," she explained, a little awe-struck. "I've sometimes thought so, too."

Sam tried to smile at her.

## PERIWINKLE

“I hope they’ll look after you this night. I hope they’ll keep watch and guard you.” He turned a sidelong glance on Dick. “Remember, you and she won’t be alone—no, you won’t be alone.” There was a sort of moan in the surfman’s voice that reminded Dick of the warning tolling of a bell-buoy.

Sam wandered away on his dreary beat alongshore.

His words oppressed them and they spoke even less than when they had started. At length, after they had gone perhaps a mile further, they came to a great sand-dune, solitary and pallid in the moonlight. He paused.

“Here’s where I sat that day, all off the key with everything, and you came and sat beside me without a word, and put me in tune. It seems centuries ago.”

She seated herself under the dune in the quaint position habitual with her—elbows on knees, chin in hands, eyes gazing at the sea. He stretched himself on the sand, his back to the water, and lay on one elbow, looking up

## PERIWINKLE

at her. Silent moments passed, and she was still gazing beyond him. Waiting in vain for an answering glance, he said finally:

“Could you ever love a man more than you love the sea?”

She answered:

“There’s no difference. Both loves are the one love.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Neither do I. How can anyone understand these things?”

They were silent again.

She was wearing a white dress and seemed to melt into the flood of moonlight bathing her. He had a feeling as if the sea and shore and the pale dune behind her were all absorbing her—as if she might slowly dissolve into the warm radiance of the night.

Overhead the sky seemed clear, but the stars were very faint, and the moon, now high above the sea, wore a vaporous veil, and the far horizon was lost in a vague blur, and the dunes’ outlines were less sharp.

## PERIWINKLE

Illusion, all was illusion, and she the centre of it, white-clad and brooding over the sea, would soon be lost in the gathering vapours.

And yet she was very real. If it was a dream, it was the vividest dream he had ever known. Here she sat close to him, her figure lithe and boyish, her quaint little face a child's, with its wistful mouth and wide-eyed wonder. The dampness was in her hair, giving it the gleaming seaweed appearance, and her hands, in which her chin was buried, looked pathetically inadequate for the work of life-saving; but there was all about her, as it were, an envelope, or atmosphere, made of the stuff of lovely qualities—courage, truth, mercy—a delicate aura surrounding her, as visible to him as the silver light that fell on her from the sky. No wonder she could take an oar in rough seas! The spirit was in her hands. No wonder she could make her way against winter storms! The spirit was everywhere in her slender body.

But unfortunately it was not this visible

## PERIWINKLE

soul of hers that most fascinated him to-night. As he looked at her red, baby lips, blossoming with unconscious seductiveness in the midst of her ethereal personality, it was as if a soul in Paradise should come suddenly upon one of earth's forbidden flowers—perhaps a crimson poppy—and should risk eternity to pluck it.

He reached forward, took her hand and said: "If I had a wish, do you know what it would be?"

She shook her head.

"To have everything go on forever as it is now."

She did not withdraw her hand. He felt it tremble in his, and she replied simply:

"That would be my wish, too."

"But it's impossible," he said.

She was still gazing seaward, striving to quiet her heart by revery and her sea-love.

"I don't know. Grandfather thinks that in a thousand years he will still be on the Cape, bringing in rubbish from the wrecks."

Dick smiled.

## PERIWINKLE

“I can believe that, and I believe that in ten thousand years, you will still be crouching here, the veiled spirit of these dunes. You and your grandfather are both unchanging, immortal. He’s the everlasting old man of the ocean; you’re an eternal sea-child—but what about me? I haven’t yet got an elemental soul like yours—though God knows I’ve been longing for it lately.”

He released her hand.

“You’ve saved my life,” he said; “you’ve given me a new birth; but is it fair not to give me a new soul, too?”

He saw a mist like the sea-mist gather in her blue eyes; but when she spoke her voice was steady, even matter-of-fact, like a child’s.

“What can I do, Dick? What do you want me to do?”

He shook his head sadly, and rose.

“I don’t know. Let’s go on. Sam was right. There’s a fog coming in.”

He helped her up, and they struck inland toward the buried forest.

## PERIWINKLE

Their course led across the dreariest expanses of the Cape, the waste that spread away for miles from the Crooked Bar station. This was the desert through which he had walked that first day when Nature, austere in her nakedness, had appalled him. Then the desert had been all burnished gold and purple in the sunlight; now it was vague, silvery and opalescent in the failing light of the moon. Then the dunes had risen about him sharply—significant and baffling shapes, tawny as lions; now they began to fade into phantoms more baffling still as the mist rolled in from the sea. Then the sand had been cloth of gold crossed in places by black streaks like scorch-marks; now in the vaporous moonlight, it was the scattered dust of pearls—white pearls faintly tinged here and there with the dust of black pearls and of opals. Then he had been alone and out of tune with that splendid midday; now he was not alone but side by side with a true sweet spirit, and they were both in harmony with these minor chords

## PERIWINKLE

of the night. As they walked on, he said:

“When I was a boy I used to have moods like this. Nature and music and poetry spoke intimately to me. Perhaps you can imagine.”

“Yes; they speak to you now.”

“Since I have known you and this solitude. Before that, the noise of the world shut out everything else—and will again when I go back to it.”

“Must you go back?”

“Five months ago I said, ‘I’m going to-morrow.’ I might say the same thing to-night. But how could I go? I can’t bear to think of the day when that to-morrow really comes.”

“If you ought to go back, Dick, then do.”

“And you?”

“I have the sea.”

“Would that satisfy you?”

“And mother and grandfather.”

“Do they satisfy you?”

He knew it was not worthy of him, but a devil had come to him in the desert.

## PERIWINKLE

“There’s a lot to be done,” she said, “at Crooked Bar—nursing the shipwrecked and all that.”

“Periwinkle, is that enough for you?”

“I wouldn’t be happy unless I could go on helping the boys at the life-saving station.”

“Are you contented with them?”

She quickened her pace.

“Think of all they’ve done for me—Ira and Jim and Captain Sears.”

“Yes; but a woman’s never really won by the things that are done for her.”

“No, Dick—I’m afraid that’s true. But I can do something for them—for Captain Sears. He retires this month without a penny in the world. If I could only find him work and a home!”

The subject did not appeal to Dick at the moment, but in spite of himself he muttered:

“What a big heart!”

She walked slower again and spoke slower, her sympathy for her simple friends gen-

## PERIWINKLE

uinely asserting itself now, and restoring her perfect balance.

“But the captain’s not strong enough for work,” she said. “The service breaks a man down. Oh! what a cruel government! No pensions! Soldiers get pensions for killing people; surfmen get none for saving people’s lives. Dick, can’t something be done about it? You’re rich—you have friends—can’t you—”

He bit his lip. As she gained above the moment, he sank lower. He was carrying the walking-stick, cut from a spar and presented to him by her grandfather. He began flecking the salt grasses with it irritably. His answer was impatient.

“I’ll see,” he said, “some day. I’ll see what I can do. Let’s be happy to-night just in ourselves.”

They were walking amid great dunes, and the dunes were now swathed in fog. About their bases it lay thick, and overhead the moon was all but obscure.

## PERIWINKLE

They came at last to the buried forest and paused at the edge. The mystery and tragedy of it always drew them.

The trees, nearly all firs and spruces once majestic, were now buried so deep by the shifting sands of years that only a few feet of their stately tops protruded, and the man and girl, standing at the edge, could look over the entire expanse of this graveyard of the trees. Some called it romantically a buried forest, though it was in reality only a small copse that once had withstood the cross-cape gales. The sad effect, however, was none the less impressive—especially now in the foggy moonlight. It was as though the dead had half risen from their tombs and were peering out into the grey world. The few branches struggling above the sand were half wrapped in a fog that clung to each like a shroud. And these ghostly cerements seemed to render the partial exposure of the poor trees scarcely decent. It would have been better had the sand

## PERIWINKLE

long ago buried them completely beneath the sight of man.

About them, too, hung a faint lustre, where the moonlight filtered through the mist, and this, shining fitfully on their green boughs and needles, heightened their ghostliness. Dick shivered and said:

“They never looked like this before. In the daytime their greenness was such a relief in this desert.”

“I always wonder,” she said, “how far down their roots are, and where their branches extend. Oh, how they must grope up toward the light and air! But they never find it. How I’d like to dig away all this mountain of sand and set them free!”

He smiled.

“Would you? What a soft-hearted baby you are! Even these trees arouse your sympathy.”

They were about to enter the weird copse when gradually they grew aware that the

## PERIWINKLE

shrouds on the tree-tops were all melting into one vast veil. In another moment the entire grove was blotted out in the fog.

Periwinkle turned with a startled exclamation and looked about her. Dick, too, turned and looked.

There was no earth and no sky. Under foot even the sand was invisible. They were standing in a stream of fog, thick as cotton batting. Overhead only a very vague effulgence told of the heavens. On all sides hung the grey blanket. The dunes were gone and so was the sea.

Periwinkle started forward, bending over the sand. She searched here and there for their footprints, but she could not trace them.

She straightened up and turned to speak to Dick. Though they were only a few feet apart she could not see him.

“Dick, where are you?”

He heard a catch in her voice he had never heard before.

## PERIWINKLE

“Here! Stand where you are,” he said.  
“Speak to me!”

“Yes, Dick. Come!”

In a moment, to her infinite relief, she felt his hand grasping hers.

“Listen,” she bade him. “If we can only hear the sea—”

“The sea would save you from me,” he said, without knowing what he meant.

He felt her quiver.

“The fog muffles even the sea’s voice,” she whispered; “we’re so far inland.”

They walked this way and that, blindly, she leading him by the hand that they might not be separated again. Finally she came to a halt, helpless.

“I’ve heard of it happening on the Cape,” she said, “but I never believed it could. Oh, Dick—we’re lost!”

“Yes,” he said, “lost.”

He put an arm about her and drew her to him, and though she did not try to release herself, he felt her shudder slightly in his grasp.

## PERIWINKLE

She seemed to be straining her eyes past him through the fog, as if trying to penetrate it by some second sight.

“But oh, Dick,” she faltered, “remember what Sam said about the souls of the drowned. I hope they are guardian angels—I do hope so—for you and me. My mother was drowned, you know. Perhaps even in this desert we’re not alone.”

## XXVII

AFTER the two had started on their walk, Ann tried to occupy herself with household duties; but these were always over by nightfall, and she could invent nothing to distract her mind.

She tried to arouse her father to conversation, demanding why he had laughed at her; but as usual he was dozing in his chair beside the stove and afforded her no companionship.

She found herself alone in the world. The intruder was gradually robbing her of the daughter she idolised. She was living over again the old tragedy of her childless days and nights, the tragedy of the empty cradle. But this was worse, more bitter, because she felt the added pangs of loss.

She had a total revulsion of mood. The

## PERIWINKLE

weak indulgence with which she had allowed Nancy to go for this walk gave place to a nervous, feverish regret that she had done so. It was not the fog that alarmed her; as yet there was only a light haze. She was tortured by the mere thought of Richard Langdon and Nancy together out somewhere in the secret night; and her anxiety was not untainted by jealousy.

She rose, she paced the floor, she stared out at the window, she turned and said to her father:

“Wake up! How can you sleep all the time? Do you think any harm’ll come to Nancy?”

He blinked up at her.

“Why are you always so set on calling her Nancy? I know. It’s because he calls her Periwinkle. My! but you’re jealous of Richard Langdon.”

“Why shouldn’t I be? He’s tearing my heart out!”

“Ann, how you do take on! You’re no bet-

## PERIWINKLE

ter'n you used to be in the old days when you went daft hankerin' for a child."

"It's ten times worse," she cried bitterly. "I've had her on this breast of mine, and now for all I know he has her on his!"

The old man chuckled again.

"What of that? He'd be the best prize we ever combed the beach for."

Ann uttered a harsh ejaculation of scorn, stood a moment staring into vacancy with narrowed eyes, then yielded to a temptation that had been gnawing at her heart for months.

She set a lamp on the kitchen table and fetching pen, ink and paper, wrote the letter long since laboriously composed and learned word for word.

It was written very precisely in the copy-book hand of the one-time schoolmistress.

*"Miss Isabel Durand,*

**"DEAR MADAM:**

"I trust you will forgive an intrusion by a stranger. I am driven to the necessity of

## PERIWINKLE

writing to you by circumstances which I cannot explain.

“I have a boarder who has given his name as Richard Langdon, but who I have reason to believe has another name which is known to you.

“Five months ago he was cast up on this shore from a burning yacht. I suspect that for some reason he is hiding from the world, and his seclusion in my house is detrimental to my welfare and the welfare of my family. I cannot, however, openly affront him for fear of hurting the feelings of a certain person who is more dear to me than life itself.

“I therefore take this means of once more connecting this young man with his past life. I have a feeling that you, if I make known to you his whereabouts, may be of service to me. I live on the Cape two miles up the beach from the Crooked Bar Life-Saving Station.

## PERIWINKLE

“Once more asking your leniency toward an old woman whose heart is broken,

“Believe me,

“Yours very truly,

“ANN SCUDDER.”

Lighting a lantern, Ann set out with this letter. Through deep sand, through great stretches of salt hay that made every step an effort, through marsh-land in which she sank almost knee deep, through brambles that tore her bedraggled skirts and stockings, she made her way inland.

By the flare of her lantern, she could detect, even in the gathering fog, the nature of her immediate surroundings and follow the trail to the village. There in the small hours, like a ghost in the deserted street, she dropped her letter into the outer box of the little postoffice.

She returned, expecting to find Nancy waiting for her. She invented an excuse for her absence. She would say she had been lonely,

## PERIWINKLE

and could not stay indoors doing nothing, so she had tried to keep on the go. There were errands to be done in the village. Perhaps this would prick Nancy's conscience. Nancy would feel badly to think of her loneliness, guilty at having left her.

This pitiful subterfuge was planned in vain. When Ann came home she found the kitchen even more desolate than before. Her father had gone to bed, and the fog had crept in through the loose windows.

She thought it strange that Nancy should have gone to bed, too, without waiting for her.

She glanced at the nickel alarm clock on the shelf behind the stove. The hands pointed to midnight. No wonder Nancy had gone to bed. The child's walk had tired her.

Ann went calmly up the narrow, creaking stairs, lantern in hand, for the hall was dark, the family wasting neither oil nor candles. She went to her own room first, where Nancy slept, and held up her lantern in the doorway.

The room was vacant; the bedclothes were

## PERIWINKLE

unturned; the white cotton spread lay flat, devoid of the undulations she knew so well, the gentle curves and convexities when Nancy lay sleeping there. And beside the bed, the chair, over which Nancy hung her underclothes at night, stood bare.

The lack of these girlish white garments, always so familiar on that chair by the bed at night, conveyed to Ann the deepest impression of the room's emptiness. Tears, such as she had never before known, sprang into her eyes. She called brokenly:

“Nance! Mr. Langdon!”

There was no answer save a wheezy ejaculation from her father, bidding her be still and not disturb his night's rest.

Fighting against her tears, she hastened to Nancy's little bedchamber which Langdon had invaded and still occupied. Holding up her lantern she saw that this room, too, was vacant.

She set down the lantern on the floor and tried to reason. What could have happened? Surely Nancy had not lost her way in the fog.

## PERIWINKLE

She knew every foot of this shore. Nevertheless Ann began to blame herself bitterly for not having insisted on their taking a lantern.

Ann went down to the kitchen, took the lamp from the table, ascended again to the little bedroom of Nancy's childhood and set the lamp in the window. Its light struggled outward only a short way into the fog, but that might be some little help if Nancy was near home without knowing it.

This small act afforded her a moment's respite; but when it was done she was left at the mercy of her emotions. She fell a victim to a mother's tragic worry and anxiety; indeed, she was almost demented.

Catching up her lantern, she went down again to the kitchen. Here she found another fleeting respite, a woman's solace in a little task. The fire was low in the stove. She took out an armful of driftwood from the wood-box, and opening the stove door, poked in the fuel, stick by stick. Then she peered into the kettle to make sure there was water in it and

## PERIWINKLE

shifted it to the middle of the stove. When Nancy came she might be chilled by the dampness.

The busy moment passed and Ann was again exposed to all the torments of her anxiety.

She went to the doorway and looked out. The shadows of the dunes hung close about the house, depriving her of even the dim moonlight that lay beyond. She fetched her lantern, and holding it high to dispel the shadows, looked out again.

“Nance!” she called piteously. “Mr. Langdon!”

Her voice was thin and unreal in the void. It reached some lonely seafowl who answered from the beach with a faint shrill cry. There was no other response save the hushed whisper of the surf.

Somehow those two answers—the cry of the lonely seafowl and the whisper of the eternal sea—added to her torture.

She plunged out into the night again, panic-stricken.

## PERIWINKLE

Hour after hour she wandered in futile search, this way and that through the fog, a figure so dishevelled, so distraught, that she herself might easily have been mistaken for one of the souls of the drowned.

What could have happened? In the past when Nancy had been helping the life-savers, she had often been out late at night; but that was expected, could be explained, whereas this was utterly unexpected, could not be explained. She had said, "Be back in good time:" and Nancy had answered, "Yes, mother, we will."

Ann thought of the great blow-holes in the sand-bank, pictured Nancy making a misstep and falling headlong, with the sand caving in upon her in fatal volume. She thought of the present flood-tide, of how, when the moon was full like to-night, the waters crept up to unusual distances, swallowing whole strips of shore. She pictured Nancy cut off by this insidious tide; saw it rising to Nancy's knees, to her waist, even to her baby lips, and strangling her.

## PERIWINKLE

Oh, the nameless pangs of her mother's imagination! It was as if a hundred devils were at her ears. Nothing but this search, this desperate physical effort of struggling about through the deep sand, the salt hay, the swamps, could have saved her reason.

She went to one of the blow-holes she knew, and peered down, holding out her lantern over the pit.

**Nothing.**

She patrolled the shore like a surfman after a wreck, on the watch for bodies. She kept an eye on the surf, fearing to see it cast up the beloved form at her feet. She stood and listened lest from somewhere some cry should come that might guide her to her daughter.

It was nearly daybreak when she dragged herself back to the cottage, but Nancy had not come home.

Again the hasty climb up the narrow, creaking stairs to the bedrooms; again the vacancy confronting her, the flat white cotton spread, the chair by the bedside, bare of the little

## PERIWINKLE

white garments that hung on it every night.

She descended once more to the kitchen, crossed to the door, and sinking down on the sill, sat facing the outer night like a stone image.

And now a devil, more malignant than all the rest, came and whispered in her ear:

“She is not dead; she is not even lost. Don’t lay it to the sand; don’t lay it to the sea or the fog. Nature does not use only these agents to harm her sons and daughters. She has other agents—their own hearts, their passions. How silly of you not to have thought of that!”

“I can’t bear, can’t bear to think of that. It would have been better if she had fallen into the sea.”

“No; his arms are more to her liking now.”

“You mean—”

“Yes, of course.”

“Oh, why did the sea ever give her to me to love so? If Richard Langdon has caused Nancy to fall this night—Oh, no, not that!

## PERIWINKLE

Never that! God save little Nancy! If Richard Langdon has caused Nancy to fall this night, then, unless there's no such thing as honour on the face of the earth, he must make her his lawful wife!"

"Lawful wife? How about that letter? Here you've just written dragging in another woman who'll like as not come and take him away from Nancy—a woman of his own class. What a fool you were! What a jealous fool!"

She groaned aloud. She herself had added to the cup of her own bitterness—to the cup of Nancy's unhappiness.

But perhaps it was all right. They were merely lost in the fog and could not get home. Nancy's babylike innocence would awake all that was good in Dick. He would guard her like an older brother.

The devil was still at her ear.

"You think so, do you? Well, even if she does go unscathed, her good name won't escape. The fact remains they are spending the night together, and folks will somehow find

## PERIWINKLE

it out. They'll gossip derisively about the girl whose mother, Ann Scudder, always said was innocent as a child. Can't you hear them? Can't you hear them classing your Nancy with Jennie Ingram, Sue Fuller, Polly Slocum, and all the loosest girls in the villages along the Cape?"

"Oh, no, not that!" cried Ann. "God save my Nancy! Whatever happens, Dick must marry her and protect her good name."

"Fool! I tell you you've prevented that by writing to this other woman to come and take him away from Nancy. Jealous fool!"

Ann struck her breast.

"I was! I was! But I'm not jealous now. I'll love him with all my heart if he'll only be good to Nancy."

"*If!*" said the devil, and that was his parting whisper.

Ann, stricken with remorse, sat staring into the greyness, forgetting to put out the light in her lantern even when the sun came stealing through the fog.

## XXVIII

FTER Periwinkle and Dick first knew that they were lost, they wandered vainly for hours, several times sitting down to rest, then again resuming their search for some known landmark.

“Poor mother,” said Periwinkle; “how she must be worrying about me!”

As a rule the girl had the homing instinct of a carrier pigeon. Through storm and darkness she could make for the beachcomber’s shack as accurately as one of her pet martins for its nest above the barn. But to-night she had lost all sense of direction.

Her helplessness at first troubled her deeply. She was forlorn as a bird with clipped wings, a wounded fawn, or any other gentle creature robbed of its little ways of escape and so at the mercy of the hunter. She said to Dick:

## PERIWINKLE

“I’d have thought I could find the way, fog or no fog. I used to have a kind of feeling that took me home straight as an arrow. But it’s strange, Dick, since I’ve known you something’s gone out of me.”

His heart smote him. They were sitting in the sand, staring blindly into the fog. He released her hand.

“What do you mean, Periwinkle?”

“I mean that I know a lot more about the world, about history, people, art, and all that, but I know less about the sea, the sky and these dunes.”

He rose restlessly.

“Let’s try once more.”

Clasping hands again to make sure of not losing each other, they plodded on through the fog.

There was nothing whatever to guide them. The points of the compass were indeterminable. The sea was nowhere. Once or twice they thought they heard a faint whisper as of distant surf, and were lured by it; but each

## PERIWINKLE

time they followed it, the whisper shifted, and Periwinkle felt that even the sea was betraying her.

There was no moon. Its light was only a vague glamour, closely shrouding them, and seemed a part of the texture of the fog.

At last overcome with fatigue and hopelessness, they surrendered.

“There’s nothing to do,” he told her, “but to make the best of it and spend the night here.”

Her hand grew cold in his and she timidly drew it away.

“Dick—must we?”

“Yes. I thought you were plucky. Why should you show the white feather? Think of the winter storms you’ve fought alone; yet to-night’s warm and you have me.”

Her voice was like the elusive whisper of the sea.

“Yes; but this is different.”

He had lost her. He reached out to reclaim her hand and clutched vapour.

## PERIWINKLE

“Periwinkle!”

No answer.

“Nancy! Nancy!”

Not a word in reply; yet he thought he heard a breathing, faint as the breath of the surf. He strained his eyes and thought he saw a gleam, warmer than the sickly moonlight—the gleam of her hair; but as he plunged forward, it dissolved. Then to his surprise he heard behind him a little laugh that was half a sob, and turned expectant; but she was not there.

Baffled, he exclaimed hoarsely:

“Periwinkle, be careful! We shall lose each other!”

Then it seemed as though he heard a low moan from her, and again his conscience smote him at thought of all that was passing in her heart.

He peered ahead and thought he saw her eyes—her eyes only. They were looking at him very wistfully out of the fog; but he decided it was hallucination because there was no

## PERIWINKLE

face nor body to be seen—only her eyes. Then he knew it was not hallucination because in a moment he saw her white form, too—first here then there, advancing, receding, cohering, dissolving, swathed in the shimmering veil of moonlight and fog. He had a feeling that she was fairly dancing around him, for the first time coquetting with him as other women had—yet how differently! What a wonderful sort of coquetry!—so silent, so mystical. No ball room—only the grey void; no music save the sea's whisper, no fan to hide her face—only the silver mist. It was as if the girl, with all her simplicity, was in this last waiting moment so ineffably feminine that she could not help coquetting with him, tantalising him, but she was doing it with her very soul, mystically, spiritually.

He heard her voice.

“Dick, I’ve lost the knack of finding my way home; but I’ve got a new knack. What do you call it?—a sixth sense. I can find *you!*”

## PERIWINKLE

Her tone, veiled and silvery like the mist, sent a thrill through him.

“Prove it!” he cried. “We mustn’t be separated again, *ever!*”

Her words were like a sigh as if a breeze stirred the vapours.

“You don’t mean that. If you had found me you wouldn’t say it. You say it because you can’t find me, and that makes you want to.”

Her voice came from everywhere and nowhere, just as the sea’s call came, and he pursued it as vainly.

Finally he stood still and said:

“Periwinkle, I’ll wait here for you till the end of the world.” He seated himself in the sand.

How long he sat there, curbing his impatience, he did not know. It seemed an hour. Then at last she stole to his side. Gradually he became conscious of a presence near him, became aware of a figure seated beside him in the sand.

He heard her breathe. It was almost as

## PERIWINKLE

though he felt a gentle warmth radiating around him, as though he began to inhale a certain indefinable fragrance. He spoke without turning, as if afraid to break the spell.

“This is just the way you came and sat beside me that first day. Not a motion, not a word.”

She answered:

“Do you know I believe I felt the same even then.” Her voice sank to a whisper. “But it’s different to-night. The souls of the drowned are watching us.”

## XXIX

THEY were sitting close to a large dune. They could dimly discern the colour of the slope, a vague opalescence rising and losing itself above them in the fog.

Periwinkle, tired and at last resigned to spending the night here, lay back and pillowed her head on the dune's breast.

"I suppose if we must, we must," she said. "I wonder if I can go to sleep. I don't feel very sleepy, do you?"

Dick sat looking down at her so close beside her that they could see each other's faces, and the weird watery light made them both strangely pale—ghostly. They were bathed in the warm fog-damp, and the smell of the brine was in their nostrils. It was as though they were sitting under the sea, on the ocean bed. There was something as of death in it all

## PERIWINKLE

—death by drowning. The sea had imparted its spirit to both of them—the sea and the fog and the invisible moon. The deep breathing of each, audible to the other, had the sea's rhythm; the power of the tide was in their bodies and souls. But the fog's veil still hung between them, and the pallid moonlight robbed them of the passionate colours of flesh and blood.

After a long silence in which he had been drinking in her quaint, elfin charm, he said:

“Periwinkle, your ear is so like a little shell that I believe if I listened close to it, I'd hear the whisper of the sea.”

Again he fell silent, meditating on her. At length he said:

“Do you know I think human memory's like a sea-shell. There's an echo in it as old as the ocean. I feel as if you and I had spent a night here together thousands of years ago.” He took her hand again, this time in both of his own. “Don't you?”

“Yes, Dick; but it's like this fog. When I

## PERIWINKLE

try to remember I lose my way. It isn't an echo. It's nothing I hear, nothing I see that makes me remember. Do you know what it is? Guess."

"I can't."

"It's this salt smell that comes in from the sea. Every now and then it takes me back I don't know how long—almost to the beginning of the world."

"How strange! And was I with you at the beginning of the world?"

"Yes. It's just as if you had given me a flower and I had kept it a thousand years." He knew that her delicate nostrils were quivering to the aroma of ocean. "And the fragrance," she murmured, "is not lost."

"The fragrance of the sea-flowers," he mused.

"The sea-flowers grow on Crooked Bar," she said. "You've seen them—all white with a million petals." Her voice had the peculiar moaning quality he had never noticed till tonight. "That's the place where the ships

## PERIWINKLE

are wrecked. That's where the sailors drown —the sailors whose souls are watching us now. My father was one of them."

Dick shivered.

"I've never known you so sad," he said. "Little Periwinkle, what a child you are!"

Again a prolonged silence, each moment intensifying the spell of this unreal night.

Once he plunged a hand forward into the breast of the dune, digging into the sand, and something in the fever of the motion made the girl catch her breath.

He flung aside the sand he had grasped and passed his hand across his hot brow. His hair felt damp in the fog. He reached down and touched hers. It, too, was moist, but long and heavy like seaweed.

He reached his hand across her waist, clinched it in the sand beyond, and resting on it, leant even closer to her, so that she was lying under his arm. She did not move.

He touched her glimmering hair again, took one of the loose strands and wrapped the end

## PERIWINKLE

into a little curl around his finger. When he withdrew his finger the curl did not unwind. In the moisture of the night, it nestled, soft and bewitching, under her ear.

He tried to look away from her into the fog, to concentrate on outer matters; but her unconscious lure was too strong for him. He gazed down at her again, this time straight into her timid blue eyes and asked in a low voice:

“Do you love me, Periwinkle?”

There was no pause before she answered, but her voice had a dying cadence in it:

“How can you help knowing?”

She lent herself to the dangerous dream and her eyes, looking up at him, brimmed with liquid light.

But his gaze was on her lips blossoming red in the grey fog. Slowly he bent down and kissed them, and she returned the kiss.

The past and future ceased to exist for her. The thought of the other woman, which for months, though undiscussed, had been a threat-

## PERIWINKLE

ening cloud, was utterly dispelled from her mind. The kiss meant that Dick loved her. That was enough. She had dreamed true.

As for Dick himself he was being tortured. He rose to his feet like a sleeper in a fever, rose wishing for the sea—to plunge into its cool depths. But there was no sea—only this unreal night and their two spirits in the void. It was not a mere mortal passion; it was disembodied. It was as if some fire in him, which was not of earth, could not be stifled longer, but must burn away the veil around her, as the sun would come at dawn and burn away the fog from the body of Nature.

In a moment he had sunk down close to her, had pressed her to him, kissing her again and again. He was on the verge of surrender. He felt that they were lost, not for the night only, but for all time.

She had no instinct of protest. She felt as though she was his bride. But she could have wept like a child.

Her kisses were salt with the saltiness of the

## PERIWINKLE

sea and of tears. They almost chilled him.

He half released her—baffled. She looked beyond him into the great mist.

“What are you thinking of?” he asked.

“I was remembering the night you were wrecked.”

“What reminded you of that? Tell me what you did to revive me.”

“I don’t know. Yes, I do. It’s what you’ve tried to make me tell you, but I never have.”

“Tell me now, then. What has that got to do with to-night?”

She put her arms around him and kissed him once more.

“That was the way I did it,” she said. “You were so cold, I had to warm you.”

“What! You did that to me—a stranger?”

“You were dying.”

He released her. Like a flash the full significance of that act of hers broke on him—its heroism, its mercy, its holy passion. He knew her wonderful virginal quality, the immaculacy of her maidenhood, and realised what

## PERIWINKLE

it must have cost her to take to her breast a shipwrecked stranger, half naked, half dead. But she had lavished herself on him then as she would now. She was one of the women who give their all.

That supreme good deed of hers had a radiant lustre about it that lit up this thick night. It showed him his own heart, his passion of the moment, this passion that was not holy but unholy—this love that he dared to offer her in return for a love like that of the angels in Heaven.

This light revealed to him the little white figure in his arms as he had never seen her before. It raised her to the level of all saints. She became at once vestal, sacred, a celestial spirit to be adored.

That act of hers had not died. It saved them now. It lived again in this moment, the quality of that first merciful embrace strangely fusing with this embrace, the spirit of that first kiss still in these kisses.

He rose quietly, the fever gone.

## PERIWINKLE

“Forgive me,” he said. “I’m not worthy to kneel to you.”

She tried to protest against his praise, but her voice had a break in it as if her nerves had suddenly relaxed. She went on pluckily, however, helping them both through the crisis.

“I remember that night so vividly that it’s just as if I was saving you all over again.” She heard him breathing hard.

“You are,” he managed to answer; “you have.”

“What a storm that was!” she found voice to exclaim. “It tires me out even now to think how the wind threw me around.” She could say nothing more. To-night a storm of a different sort had tossed her soul about as cruelly as that other storm had tossed her body. He did not hear her sob, but in the moonlight he saw tears overflowing her eyes. He let them fall unhindered, knowing they were the tears of her heart’s relief.

He sat at her feet with face averted.

## PERIWINKLE

It was perhaps an hour later when she said:  
“Dick, let’s try to go to sleep.”

She lay on her side, pillowng her cheek in her hand on the dune’s breast, like a tired child.

He groped about and found his walking-stick—the beachcomber’s strange gift to him.

“Periwinkle,” he said, his voice whimsical but very earnest; “in the old days when a man and girl were lost as we are, the man, if he was a Christian knight, laid down his sword between them before they slept. Here’s mine.”

He placed it beside her, then stretched himself at full length beyond it.

“Thanks, Dick. Do you know I believe Sam was right. The souls of the drowned have been watching over us—mother’s soul and father’s. Good-night, Dick.” And she fell asleep as easily as a child.

He lay awake a long time pondering on this little sea-foundling at his side, lay awake wondering at the beauty of her nature. Then at last he, too, slept.

## **PERIWINKLE**

**In the morning they stood at the edge of the sea, looking eastward into the dawn.**

**The fog was dissolving slowly. There was no sudden burning away of it. The sun drew aside the veil gradually.**

### XXX

**J**IM and Ira stood in the lookout above the Crooked Bar Life-Saving Station. Ira was gazing through a marine glass across the dunes and waste expanses, in the direction of the buried forest. Jim stood at Ira's side, his big frame rigid, his brow lowering, his eyes straining to span the distance and make sure of his friend's verdict. That verdict was laconic and resonant as a death sentence.

"Yes; it's them sure enough—Periwinkle and him. Sam saw them start out after sundown. They've spent the night together in the open."

Jim trembled.

"Give me the glass."

He took it and raised it to his eyes. After one look a groan broke from his big breast. Periwinkle and Langdon were walking homeward in the dawn. Jim said dully:

## PERIWINKLE

“Whatever’s happened there’s no harm in Periwinkle—not the least mite.”

“No,” assented Ira, shaking as if with an ague. “If he dragged her down to hell she’d still be an angel.” He looked about him furtively, dropped a quick, oblique glance across at the trap in the floor to make sure no one else had entered the lookout. Certain of their privacy, he turned to his companion and said:

“Jim, I told him if he plucked that flower for a night’s pleasure we’d drown him in the sea.” Ira’s face was strained, its network of lines, sharp-cut by the weather, was tense and twisted; its scars left by storm and wreckage showed livid in the morning light. “That’s what I told him,” he said, “and by God, we’ll do it!”

He crossed to the trap-door and hastily descended the ladder. Down in the mess-room he found Sam Coffin alone. Sam stood at the wide east window, staring absently over the sea. Ira tried to control himself a moment.

## PERIWINKLE

“What do you make out, Sam? Nor'-easter afoot, ain’t there?”

Sam took his pipe from his mouth and pressed down the tobacco with a tapering fore-finger.

“Looks so. Guess it’ll be squallish by night. But it wasn’t the weather I was thinkin’ of. What do you suppose I saw last night when I was patrollin’?”

“How sh’d I know?”

“I’ll swear,” said Sam, “I saw an old woman’s ghost hauntin’ the shore. There was a kind of light about her, all blurry in the fog. She couldn’t have been mortal. She went plumb through marshes and quicksands and over the tops of the dunes. I kept under cover of the bank so she couldn’t see me, for she was no human woman. Once I thought I heard her cry out far off, but maybe it was the cry of a gull.”

Ira uttered a short mirthless laugh.

“I guess it was.” His face darkened.

## PERIWINKLE

“Or maybe it was Periwinkle’s mother out searchin’ for her.”

Sam blew forth a cloud of smoke and peered through it at the sea with narrowed eyes.

“Which mother?”

“Which mother! Ann Scudder, of course.”

“No,” said Sam; “the drowned one come ashore to guard and protect her.”

Ira once again remembered that arm uplifted from the sea with a mother-love almost superhuman. But all his memories were now turned to bitterness.

“Guard and protect her, eh? She made a poor job of it, then.” His voice fell to a whisper and he thrust his face forward close to Sam’s. “Periwinkle spent the night out there with Richard Langdon. She’s walkin’ home with him now.”

Sam Coffin’s face went ashen. He seemed suddenly to shrink in size. His stoop became all at once more pronounced, his cheeks more emaciated. The old light in his eyes, which

## PERIWINKLE

had always seemed the light of some struggling inspiration, died out.

“What can we do?” he asked shivering.

Ira’s voice had a dull rasping ring in it like rusty iron.

“Damn him! We can make him pay the reck’nin’!”

He turned to leave, strung to breaking-point, but Sam anxiously detained him with a hesitating hand on his arm.

“Wait, Ira,” he pleaded. “I’ve got a plan.” Hurriedly, to stem the tide of the other’s vengeance, he proposed a curious alternative.

Ira’s answer was a laugh, harsh and bitter; then observing the dismay on his companion’s face, he jerked out:

“All right, try it an’ see; but your way or mine, we’ll make him pay the reck’nin’. Damn him!”

On their way home Periwinkle and Dick saw a solitary man far ahead following the trail

## PERIWINKLE

that led from the life-saving station, through miles of sand and swamp, to the village. Even at a distance the man was familiar to Periwinkle—the step that had lost its spring, the nobly built body that had lost its erectness and indomitable carriage, the fine head that was now bent and grey.

The lonely figure was Captain Sears.

She quickened her pace and in a few minutes she and Dick caught up with him.

“Captain, are you going into the village?”

He greeted them as always, knowing nothing of their night on the sand. But his look was abstracted, and as he gazed over the vast spaces of the Cape, his deep-set eyes were as desolate as the desert.

“Yes,” he answered slowly; “I’m going into the village.”

Something in his voice disturbed Periwinkle. She turned to her companion.

“One moment, Dick. I must speak to Captain Sears alone.”

She took the captain’s arm and led him off

## PERIWINKLE

to a little distance under cover of a low sand-hill.

Dick did not have to wait long for her. In a few minutes she rejoined him, and he saw that she was troubled, agitated.

"Oh, Dick," she said, "the Captain's been forced to retire a month ahead of his time. He had a dizzy turn yesterday and keeled over in the surf, right in the middle of boat-practice. The superintendent has laid him off, says it wouldn't be safe to trust a wreck to him. Oh, Dick, think of it! He's heart-broken. He hasn't even told the crew he's leaving forever. He couldn't bear the good-bye." Her voice faltered; her eyes suddenly filled with tears. "Think of it, Dick! He hasn't a relation in the world and nothing to live on. Not a penny of pension after all these years of splendid service. Poor Captain! Poor Captain! He wouldn't tell me at first, but I forced it out of him. Dick, unless something turns up, he'll have to go to the poor-farm."

## PERIWINKLE

The tears rolled down her cheeks. Dick had never seen her so distressed.

“Look at him,” she said, and gazed off through her tears in passionate sorrow at the crushed figure trudging away wearily across the desert.

Dick’s heart was deeply touched.

“It’s the cruellest injustice,” he exclaimed, “any government could be guilty of!” Then with a burst of impulsive generosity he said to her, “If his country won’t pension him, I will!” What? the poor-farm for that old hero? Never! I’ll take care of him myself!”

She smiled sadly and shook her head.

“You don’t know his pride. He’d rather die than live on charity.” She turned to Dick, and her face was very pale. “No; there’s only one thing to be done.” Her lip quivered and she looked at him with the quaintest expression of forlornness from which there shone out, nevertheless, such a look of pluck that it seemed to be the perfect flowering of her nature. “Dick, you’ll have to go away; you’ll have

## PERIWINKLE

to give up your room at our house. Then the captain can come and live with mother, grandfather and me. He can fish and shoot, and I'll raise cranberries with him, so he'll think he's earning his board and lodging. That's the only thing to be done."

She turned away to hide her face and started homeward along the shore. Dick, following her in bewilderment, began to remonstrate, but she gently stopped him.

"Don't, Dick. It's best anyway. Perhaps that's why it's happened. We oughtn't to be together any more, you and I. We keep forgetting you're not a free man. Oh, Dick. . . ."

## XXXI

**A**NN was still seated on the door-sill when Dick and Periwinkle came into view around one of the farther dunes.

As soon as she saw them she rose and went into the kitchen to conceal the fact that she had been waiting. She did a queer thing. She hastened upstairs to her room, and crossing to the double bed, rumpled up the sheets, blanket and counterpane on her side to convey the impression that she had spent the night as usual. Then she descended to the kitchen and set about preparing breakfast in her most methodical way.

They burst into the house, eager to reassure her, Periwinkle in the lead.

“Mother, were you terribly worried?” She kissed Ann’s marble cheek.

Ann wrapped an arm about her neck a mo-

## PERIWINKLE

ment, looking into her eyes; but the arm shook and she withdrew it at once.

“I couldn’t make out what had happened?” she said, turning and busying herself with the cooking-utensils on the stove.

“We got lost,” said Periwinkle. “I wouldn’t have believed it possible, but we did.”

“Where were you?”

“When the fog lifted at sun-up, we found we had circled back again to the buried forest.”

Richard said:

“Mrs. Scudder, we were as hopelessly lost as if we’d been blind people.”

“What do you mean by lost?” asked Ann, carrying the coffee-pot from stove to table.

“Naturally I mean we couldn’t find our way home.”

Ann spoke to Periwinkle without looking at her.

“Come upstairs a minute with me.”

She led the way into their bedroom, locked the door and turned to Nancy coldly.

## PERIWINKLE

“Tell me about it.”

“Mother, I have told you.”

“Are you the same Nancy that left this house last night?”

Nancy flushed—not crimson, but like a wild rose. Yesterday she might not have understood. To-day she did understand. Her head drooped, but she said in a faint voice:

“Yes, I am.”

Ann dumbly took her to her heart, strained the girl to her flat breast. Releasing her she went to the bed, sank to her knees beside it and lifted blind eyes to Heaven.

The vapours that had crept into the room the night before were gone. The neat interior was bright and fresh. Through an open window came the morning air, the little cries of martins, sea-mews and sand-pipers, and the rippling murmur of the surf.

How different those voices seemed now!

The sunlight, slanting in at the window, fell across Ann’s face. It was the face of a grim

## PERIWINKLE

and haggard woman transfigured by thanksgiving.

“Nancy, look at this bedding. I rumpled it up not ten minutes since. Did you think I slept here snug and comfortable? No, Nance, I didn’t. I was stark awake all night, waiting and looking for my baby.”

“Poor mother! I’m so sorry.”

“Well, it’s over; but he has got to protect your good name.”

“What do you mean, mother?”

“Never mind now. Come down to breakfast. Your coffee’ll be lukewarm.”

Ann unlocked the door, but Nancy rested a hand against it.

“Mother, please put it out of your mind that Dick has got to do anything about this. Even if I’d come back home to-day not the same Nancy that left this house last night, I wouldn’t blame Dick. I’d rather die than say he’d got to protect my name?”

“Don’t be foolish, Nance. If he’s a man he’ll stand by you of his own accord.”

## PERIWINKLE

"No; he can't. He's bound to another woman. He told me at the very beginning—but we almost forgot."

Ann stifled a moan.

"I felt it! I knew it!" she exclaimed in despair. "What can we do?"

Nancy returned quietly:

"Nothing. Dick's going away."

"What!"

"I've asked him to leave."

"Then you're crazy. You like him, don't you?"

"I met Captain Sears. He's retired from the service, broken down. He hasn't any money or friends or home. He hasn't anywhere to go but the poor-farm. So I knew if I begged you, you'd take him in." Nancy's hand stole to her mother's. "He can earn his board, fishing and shooting and raising cranberries." She glanced off wistfully through the open window at the sea. "But Dick will have to go to make room for him."

She stood motionless, gazing into the sun-

## PERIWINKLE

shine, forgetting her mother's presence. Her white dress, damp and clinging to her, revealed a supple figure, very youthful, but not so quaintly boyish as when her clothes hung loose. Her hair still gleamed with the night's moisture, and the separate strands straggling forth, straight, damp and rather short, had the usual seaweed look that made her seem waifish. But to-day the end of one of these vagrant locks lay nestled under her ear in a little circle of red bronze that was the merest ghost of a curl.

Her eyes, looking out under level brows, were fearless, though wistful. It was as if she had lost herself beyond the horizon and stood at gaze, face to face with life's new meanings.

Ann's eyes as she watched the girl began to shine, too. She said within herself:

“God has given me one of His angels for a daughter.”

But aloud she only said as she opened the door: “Come child; you've been fasting twelve hours.”

## XXXII

**I**RA had been weatherwise that morning. By noon the wind had risen to a gale, by night to a hurricane.

The storm kept the revengeful surfmen busy on the beach. They had no chance to call Langdon to account. Up and down the Cape that night many a fiery signal flared through the storm, warning some vessel off the shoals.

Big Jim, acting as keeper in the place of Captain Sears, retired, had no time to spare from his new command. He and his crew in their close watch upon the sea to cheat it of its prey, had no time for the saving of the beloved child they believed more tragically cast away, nor yet to grieve over the wreckage of their own hearts.

Periwinkle spent the next day in the village.

## PERIWINKLE

It was after dark when she returned home. She found her mother preparing supper in the kitchen. As she entered, Ann greeted her without looking up from the stove.

“Nance, have you seen your grandfather?”

“No; is he out?”

“Yes, on the beach, still looking for rubbish. A man near eighty! Every September it’s just the same. You know how he is. When the storms begin he takes a new lease of life. He gets the craving for wreckage.”

She dismissed the subject with a sort of sharp hiss indicative of scorn.

“Did you see Cap’n Sears?”

“Yes, and I’ve persuaded him to come.”

Nancy sank into a chair beside the table and gazed across musingly at the red coals glowing between the bars of the stove’s small grate.

“Mother, you don’t know how happy you’re making Captain Sears by giving him a home. He says he’ll come, and already he looks like a new man. He thinks he can earn his board the way I suggested—fishing and cranberry-

## PERIWINKLE

raising. He says you and I've got more heart than the government. The government was going to let him starve or go to the poorhouse, but we've saved him, he says. Mother, aren't you glad?"

Ann shifted her cooking-utensils on the stove.

"I'm glad if it makes you happy as well as him. Does it, Nance?"

Periwinkle rose restlessly.

"Yes, mother."

"Your voice don't sound so. Dick ain't really going away, is he? He told me, rather than leave you, he'd sling a hammock out under your window and sleep there."

"Yes, mother; but it's best for him to go. Where is he?"

"He started out to meet you. Strange he missed you."

"No, I came the long way round. I didn't want to see him. I can't bear to see him again. It'll only make it harder."

Ann, helpless and worn with worry, kept

## PERIWINKLE

doggedly to the saving duties at the stove.

“Sit down, child. Supper’s ready. We won’t wait for your grandfather. Come; I’ve made you some hot chocolate as a special treat.”

“I can’t, mother; I can’t eat a thing. I’m going out on the beach—to patrol the shore the way I used to. That’ll help me forget. It’s beginning to rain and the sea’s sort of uneasy. There may be work to do helping the surf-men.”

She crossed to a corner for her suit of oil-skins, long unworn. Taking down from their pegs the yellow sou’wester and clumsy trousers, she put them on as of old and coiling up her hair, donned the broad brimmed rubber hat. Next she slipped off her shoes and pulled on her rubber boots. Then crossing to another corner, she took from a rusty hook on the wall a patrolman’s lantern and lighted it. This done, she rummaged in the cupboard drawer, found a couple of Coston signals and stuck them in her breast. As she did so her fingers touched the sharp corner of an envelope which

## PERIWINKLE

she had brought from the village post-office and forgotten. She drew it out and dropped it on the table.

“Here’s a letter for you, mother.”

Ann, her heart hammering hard, eyed the letter askance, but let it lie untouched and turned her back on it.

Periwinkle, now ready for the beach, came to her and kissed her good-bye. Ann said:

“Nance, don’t go. Let me try to comfort you.”

“No, mother dear. I’ve got to be alone awhile out there with the sea.” And Ann knew that it had to be so.

Periwinkle did not walk far at first. She seated herself under the shelter of one of the dunes and gazed off through the gloom that had settled over the ocean.

The night was not cold, but the drizzle made it dreary, and the sky, full of broken masses of cloud, was hard to read. So was the sea with its subtle uneasiness.

Whether or not the signs were ominous or

## PERIWINKLE

promising, Periwinkle could not tell. She tried to read them with interest as of old—with the knowing wisdom of the little sea-dog she had once been—but the effort was futile. Her heart was not with the sky or ocean. Her eyes, widely regarding them, did not even see them but only a vacancy so thick with the drizzle that she could not be sure whether it was rain-drops that trickled down her cheeks, or tears. She thought it was tears because she felt them somehow behind her eyes—a great pent-up flood springing from sources to which the rain could not have penetrated.

At last this inner dam broke, and turning, she flung herself face down in the sand, sobbing her heart out. As she lay there, Sam Coffin, on patrol duty, passed, and seeing her little body in the oilskins, so shaken, smothered a moan of sympathy. But something in his queer sensitive soul bade him leave her alone in her sorrow. So he plodded along on his weary beat with a grief scarcely less tender and lonely than hers.

## PERIWINKLE

He had not gone far when he met Langdon also walking the beach alone.

Langdon carried no lantern. He emerged out of the gloom suddenly, and as Sam's light lit him up, Sam saw that he was over-wrought.

"Where's Periwinkle?" Dick asked at once. "Have you seen Periwinkle?" His voice was hoarse; his eyes were anxious.

Sam took his arm and led him along the beach away from her.

"Where've you been, Mr. Langdon?"

"I've been looking for her. I feared—"

Far ahead on the bluff Sam saw two little dim lights and recognised them as surfmen's lanterns like his own. He quickened his pace.

"Come, sir," he said, his grasp on Dick's arm tightening almost unnoticeably. "Come with me."

Dick saw the lanterns and ran forward in advance of Sam. He remembered how she had once told him that she would like to go down deep into the sea. Tortured by remorse and anxiety, he asked, panting:

## PERIWINKLE

“Have they found her?”

He hastily climbed the headland. At the top he paused, wavering.

He was now on the high rampart between sea and Cape, and the two lights ahead were like those of sentinels waiting to challenge him. “What do you want with me?” he demanded suspiciously.

Sam took his arm again.

“Come, sir,” he implored; “I know it’ll be all right. I’m sure it’ll be all right. I’ve got a plan.”

The men further on saw Sam’s lantern approaching, and plunged forward to meet it.

They were Jim and Ira.

“What has happened?” asked Dick.

Sam joined his friends, and the three surf-men faced Langdon.

“Thank God!” exclaimed Ira exultantly. “We’ve got you at last!”

Dick recoiled.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean you’ve got a score to settle. That’s

## PERIWINKLE

what I mean—yes, and you'll settle that score if I die for it!"

Dick was dazed by the suddenness and strangeness of the situation. There in the night, with the great cloud-masses moving overhead, and the tide, far below, stirring restlessly against the bank, and the rainy drizzle blurring every outline, the three surfmen looked to him like phantoms risen out of the sea to judge him.

The utter isolation of the spot added to this unearthly effect. It might as well have been a thousand miles from civilisation. On the one side lay the dark waters, living and vast, yet utterly desolate, and on the other side, more desolate still, the everlasting sand.

There was little wind, but that little came from the eastward, heavy and brackish with sea-salt. The lantern-light, wavering across the men's oilskins, lent to the group a watery yellow tinge in the midst of the surrounding darkness. It struggled upward through the gloom and struck on their faces, too—on that

## PERIWINKLE

of Jim Curran, big-featured and grave; on that of Sam Coffin, forlorn to wretchedness, on that of Ira, ridged and seamed by the heat of his enmity.

Ira spoke with a rapid clipped utterance like a volley of rifle-fire:

“Here’s the case against you, quick and straight: You came like a thief in the night—yes, you did—and you stole Nancy away from us. But that ain’t all you’ve done. You’ve robbed her likewise—robbed her of her innocence—lured her off into the fog to spend the night with her.”

He advanced on Dick with jaw thrust forward and eyes like slits.

“There, Richard Langdon, that’s what you’ve done. Curse you!”

Dick was calm as death. He said very quietly:

“You have made a great mistake. Your accusation is unjust.”

Ira uttered an ugly laugh.

“Tell that to somebody else. Whatever you

## PERIWINKLE

did do, or didn't do—her good name's gone, and you're the man who robbed her of it."

He set aside his lantern, pushed his distorted face close to Dick's and ground the fist of one hand into the palm of the other.

"And now, by God!" he cried savagely, "you'll pay the reck'nin'!"

Dick saw that he was trapped. A few steps backwards, and he would go over the edge of this towering sand-bank into the sea. He saw, too, that he was threatened by something even more menacing than the primitive justice of these men. Sam and Jim seemed to him mere accessories, but in Ira's face, now thrust close to his, and with the lantern-light striking up slant-wise across it, he read venomous motives of revenge.

Ira's features were shrivelled by hate; his eyes glittered. The man was virulently jealous.

As Dick glanced about, looking for some way of escape, Sam came to him and said anxiously:

## PERIWINKLE

"Listen to my plan, sir. If you do the square thing, everything'll be all right. I went to the village to-day and brought out a minister to the station. Now what I suggest is that you marry Periwinkle this very night."

Ira drew back a step, caught up his lantern and held it high to see Langdon's face.

That face was hard to read, it was crossed by such conflicting emotions.

Dick stood silent.

"Will you do it, or won't you?" demanded Ira impatiently. "If it was me, I wouldn't give you the chance."

Dick kept silent.

Then Sam made a final plea, and his voice had a falling cadence in it like the sad east wind.

"How can you have it in you, sir, to go off to-morrow and forsake her? You're breakin' her heart. Not ten minutes since, I saw her lyin' face down in the sand, weepin' as if she'd like to die."

Dick kept silent.

## PERIWINKLE

Then big Jim spoke, his deep voice booming forth ominously in the night:

“Choose, Mr. Langdon!”

At last Dick answered them in a tone unnatural and strained.

“I have no choice. I can’t do it.”

On the instant, Ira acted. He flung aside his lantern so violently that it fell on its side, flaring and smoking in the sand. Then he sprang like a panther at Langdon’s throat.

The onslaught was so sudden that Dick could not defend himself. His pluck and strength were of little avail. No other attack could have been so sure. The fingers throttling him were like the talons of a hawk. He felt himself being forced back toward the sandy verge, and in that last moment, he remembered Ira’s warning:

“If you pluck that flower for a night’s pleasure, we’ll drown you in the sea!”

Sam and Jim, sick at heart, instinctively closed their eyes to shut out the terrible climax.

Dick went backward, backward, till he felt

## PERIWINKLE

the sand at the edge crumble under his heel.

Then for one instant with a desperate effort, he caught Ira's hands away from his throat. In that brief interval, he uttered an inarticulate death-cry; then the bony fingers strangled him again.

It was as if that cry had power to materialise out of the night the woman who loved him. They heard an answering cry, eager, hasty, thrilling with anxiety; and even Ira hesitated. That was the one note that could have stayed him.

Turning to look along the headland, they saw Periwinkle's boyish figure come running toward them through the rain—an apparition of her as of old—lantern swinging as she ran—rubber boots, rubber hat, yellow oilskin trousers and coat. How often had they seen her run to them thus with aid when some poor sinking ship lay off the bar!

Their jaws fell; they stared at the vision in dumb bewilderment. Ira released his victim and slunk back beside Jim and Sam.

## PERIWINKLE

the captain and gone to Washington to work for a pension for old surfmen like him; how I'd have really buckled down to my painting after the inspiration I've had from you and Nature on this shore; how we'd have gone abroad in the winters and you'd have seen the places and things I've told you about, and I'd have been very proud of you, my dear sea-spirit, so strange, so lovely."

She turned away.

"Dick, why do you say all this?" she faltered.

He replied:

"To try to make it last—to try to make it echo forever. Then we won't quite lose it all our lives."

"I'd rather lose it. I couldn't live with that echo. I'd go down into the sea to my own mother and ask her to sing me to sleep so I couldn't hear that echo and long for you. Oh, Dick, just this one favour—say good-bye and end it all."

She turned to him in wistful appeal.

## PERIWINKLE

He took off her hat, letting her hair fall about her shoulders, and as the light from her lantern slanted upwards across it in the damp night, it glimmered with that never-to-be-forgotten ruddy lustre, as of sea-grasses on a wave.

He touched it where it fell to her breast.

“Good-bye, Periwinkle.”

“Thanks, Dick. Now not another word.”

She turned and made off swiftly, and he, obeying her sad, plucky little wish, mutely followed her lantern through the night.

Suddenly he heard a breathless voice behind him, and as he turned, the light from another lantern filled his eyes. It struck across the face of Ann Scudder, transformed by a virile joy.

“Where’ve you been?” she panted. “We must have crossed each other, hid by the dunes. Read this.” She thrust a letter before him and raised up her lantern to it, meanwhile keeping an eye on Nancy’s lantern now far ahead.

## PERIWINKLE

*"Mrs. Scudder,*

"DEAR MADAM: I fear I can be of no service to you. Please tell Mr. Langdon, as he calls himself, that I received his letter and hope he is enjoying the simple life. For my part it does not appeal to me. Please tell him, too, that I am now married. The happy event occurred only last month.

"Yours very truly,  
"ISABEL DURAND HUNNEWELL."

Dick looked up at Ann in amazement.

"How in the world—"

"I wrote to her," Ann confessed hastily. "I found out her name and address from the man who posted your letter. I felt in my bones you were somehow bound to her. Your face showed you weren't free. I was a jealous fool, meddling so; but it's all right now, it's all right now!" she exclaimed in vehement relief. "Ain't it?"

His eyes shone. For answer he caught her

## PERIWINKLE

queer twisted old face in his hands and kissed her.

She shook him off in her crabbed way, but she was almost radiant.

"Keep those for Nance," she said. "Now answer me straight. Do you want my girl or don't you?"

He gazed ahead at the little lantern receding like a will-o'-the-wisp into the night, and his eyes had a starved look.

"I want her!"

He started to follow the will-o'-the-wisp lantern, but Ann caught his arm.

"I met Sam Coffin over yonder. He says there's a minister spending the night in the station."

Dick laughed, a sudden, light-hearted laugh, jubilant, care-free.

"Dear old Sam!" he cried, and started with all speed after Periwinkle.

As he came up to her he said breathlessly:

## PERIWINKLE

“The dream’s come true! I’m a free man!  
Here’s a letter releasing me! Look!”

He was like a boy.

Periwinkle took the note, and raising her lantern, read the reprieve through gathering tears of happiness.

“Dick—oh, Dick!—then—”

“Yes, the dream’s come true, I tell you. No more good-byes.”

He took her in his arms, pressed her to him, clad as she was like a young surfman.

“Periwinkle, there’s a minister at the station to-night, and there’s no time like the present.”

The full meaning of his words did not come home to her at first.

“Dick, I can’t be married in these clothes,” she said dazedly.

“Why not? You’ve saved men’s lives in them, and now you’re saving a man’s soul.”

He took her hand, leading her back the way they had come. She was like a bewildered child, listening to some wonderful fairy story.

## PERIWINKLE

Ann, seeing them coming, turned, and trudging forward eagerly through the sand, led the way to the station.

\* \* \* \* \*

Any observer of that strange wedding in the little mess-room would have remembered it always.

Jim, Sam, Ira and the rest of the crew, were ranged around the walls. Their bitterness had left them. They tried to make the best of it, for her sake. They were losing her, but she was safe, and that consoled them.

Ann, erect and alone in the middle of the room, suggested a rock as usual, but now a rock with all its crags and crevices bathed in soft lantern-light.

The tall minister stood with his back to the stove and facing Dick and Nancy.

Dick was again a youth. He looked transfigured. His bearing was free and strong.

And Periwinkle, in her surfman's oilskins, looked like a youth, too—very quaint, but nevertheless with that elusive loveliness about

## PERIWINKLE

her which was the palpitant atmosphere of her womanhood.

Outside in the night, a face was pressed close against the window-pane. The old beachcomber, forgotten in the excitement of the last few hours, stood peering in at the ceremony, and just as the minister said the last, "Amen," they were startled by a chuckle from without. But when they turned to the window, there was nothing to be seen, so they ascribed it to the wind. He had already drifted back to his mania along the shore.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Periwinkle, let's go to the buried forest again."

"Not home?"

"No—the night's warm. Let's spend it in the open once more."

They had roamed out again to the headland after taking Ann home, and though alone in the vast expanses, they were speaking so low that they almost whispered their secret words.

The drizzle had ceased by now and there

## PERIWINKLE

were long rifts in the clouds. The night was like that other night except that the mist hung lighter and was already dissolving like a veil that is drawn aside. From behind a cloud, high over the sea, fell a soft effulgence from the hidden moon; and this, being reflected on the now untroubled waters, lay like a magic pathway to the indeterminate horizon.

All was illusion, pale and impalpable as gossamer; all save one star almost on a level with their gaze—red Mars, hanging low and tremulous in the east above the ocean.

“Come, Periwinkle.”

“Yes, Dick; but wait.” She was looking toward the outer reefs where the white foam-flowers shone faintly in the shadows.

“No, come. The sea can’t claim you any more.”

She smiled.

“Just a moment, Dick. Don’t you see that little schooner? She’s too far in. Do you suppose the mist hides the shore?”

As she spoke she felt in her breast and took

## PERIWINKLE

out one of the Coston signals she had put there on starting out to patrol the beach. Shielding it under her open coat, she lit it, then held it high above her head.

The torch was as red as red Mars and flared through the night, just opposite to that crimson planet. Dick, seeing her standing there, holding it aloft in her little hand, waited and watched her. He saw that her eyes were intent on the small schooner, and that not until it answered her warning by altering its course away from the jeopardy of Crooked Bar, did she even remember his presence.

Then he realised that she would never be utterly his. There was a quality in little Periwinkle that was for all humanity.

And yet in after years he often liked to think of her thus on the dark headland, her slim figure quaintly boyish in her oilskin coat and trousers, her little hand holding aloft her torch to send out, from her heart's illimitable mercy, saving signals to men in danger on the sea.

THE NEW YORK  
PUBLIC LIBRARY

ADULT LITERATURE  
CHILDREN'S LITERATURE



